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Arshile Gorky: The Last Move

ANATOLE BROYARD:

Look at the Man! — a story

POEMS BY RICHMOND LATTIMORE, W. D. SNODGRASS,
THEODORE ROETHKE. TRANSLATIONS FROM THE LAO
BY RONALD PERRY.

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS BY PATRICK CRUTTWELL,
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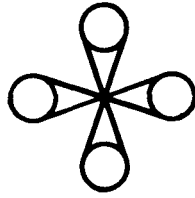
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WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

Pictures from Brueghel

Self Portrait: The Old Shepherd

In a red winter hat blue
eyes smiling
just the head and shoulders

crowded on the canvas
arms folded one
big ear the right showing

the face slightly tilted
a heavy wool coat
with broad buttons

gathered at the neck reveals
a bulbous nose
but the eyes red-rimmed

from over-use he must have
driven them hard
but the delicate wrists

show him to have been a
man unused to
manual labor unshaved his

blond beard half trimmed
no time for any-
thing but his painting

Brueghel: 1

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

Brueghel: 2

The overall picture is winter
icy mountains
in the background the Return

from the Hunt it is toward evening
from the left
sturdy hunters lead in

their pack the inn-sign
hanging from a
broken hinge is a stag a crucifix

between his antlers the cold
inn yard is
deserted but for a huge bonfire

that flares wind-driven tended by
women who cluster
about it to the right beyond

the hill is a pattern of skaters
Brueghel the painter
concerned with it all has chosen

a winter struck bush for his
foreground to
complete the picture . . .

Brueghel: 3

From the Nativity
which I have already celebrated
the Babe in its Mother's arms

the Wise Men in their stolen
splendor
and Joseph and the soldiery

attendant
with their incredulous faces
make a scene copied we'll say

from the Italian masters
but with a difference
the mastery

of the painting
and the mind the resourceful mind
that governed the whole

the alert mind dissatisfied with
what it is asked to
and cannot do

accepted the story and painted
it in the brilliant
colors of the chronicler

the downcast eyes of the Virgin
as a work of art
for profound worship

Brueghel: 4

Pour the wine bridegroom
where before you the
bride is enthroned her hair

loose at her temples a head
of ripe wheat on
the wall beside her the

guests seated at long tables
the bagpipers are ready
there is a hound under

the table the bearded Mayor
is present women in their
starched head-gear are

gabbing all but the bride
hands folded in her
lap is awkwardly silent simple

dishes are being served
clabber and what not
from a trestle made of an

unhinged barn door by two
helpers one in a red
coat a spoon in his hat band

Brueghel: 5

The living quality of
the man's mind
stands out

and its covert assertions
for art, art, art!
painting

that the Renaissance
tried to absorb
but

it remained a wheatfield
over which the
wind played

men with scythes tumbling
the wheat in
rows

the gleaners already busy
it was his own—
magpies

the patient horses no one
could take that
from him

Brueghel: 6

Summer!
the painting is organized
about a young

reaper enjoying his
noonday rest
completely

relaxed
from his morning labors
sprawled

in fact sleeping
unbuttoned
on his back

the women
have brought him his lunch
perhaps

a spot of wine
they gather gossiping
under a tree

whose shade
carelessly
he does not share the

resting
center of
their workaday world

Brueghel: 7

Disciplined by the artist
to go round
& around

in holiday gear
a riotously gay rabble of
peasants and their

ample-bottomed doxeys
fills
the market square

featured by the women in
their starched
white headgear

they prance or go openly
toward the wood's
edges

round and around in
rough shoes and
farm breeches

mouths agape
Oya!
kicking up their heels

Brueghel: 8

The parable of the Blind
without a red
in the composition shows a group

of beggars leading
each other diagonally downward
across the canvas

from one side
to stumble finally into a bog
where the picture

and the composition ends back
of which no seeing man
is represented

the unshaven features of the des-
titute with their
few pitiful possessions

a basin to wash in
a peasant's cottage are seen
and a church spire

the faces are raised as toward
the light no detail
extraneous to the compos-

ition one following the other
tentative stick in
hand triumphant to disaster

Brueghel: 9 Children's Games

1

This is a schoolyard
crowded
with children

of all ages near a village
on a small stream
meandering by

where some boys
are swimming
bare ass

or climbing a tree in leaf
everything
is motion

elder women are looking
after the small
fry

a play wedding a
christening
nearby one leans

hollering
into
an empty hogshead

2

Little girls
whirling their skirts about
until they stand out flat

tops pinwheels
to run in the wind with
or a toy in 3 tiers to spin

with a piece
of twine to make it go
blind-man's-buff follow the

leader stilts
high and low tip cat jacks
bowls hanging by the knees

standing on your head
run the gauntlet
a dozen on their backs

feet together kicking
through which a boy must pass
roll the hoop or a

construction
made of bricks
some mason has abandoned

3

The desperate toys
of children
their

imagination equilibrium
and rocks
which are to be

found
everywhere
and games to drag

the other down
blindfold
to make use of

a swinging
weight
with which

at random
to bash in the
heads about

them
Brueghel saw it all
and with his grim

humor faithfully
recorded
it

W. D. SNODGRASS

Leaving Ithaca

To my plaster replica of the Aphrodite of Melos

Lady who stands on my long writing table,
I've brought seashells and fossils; I have put
Oak leaves weathered to gray lace at your foot,
Meaning I'll go your way when I am able.

Ten years now we've been transients since my mother
Mailed you off, packed in towels, when I first married.
How often you've been boxed up, shipped and carried
From house to house, from one love to another.

When we first met, you'd lost a set of toes
And both your arms. Oh everloving Lady,
You had been ruined quite enough already;
Now the children have chipped off half your nose.

My first wife tried to keep you in the attic;
Some thought your breasts just so-so and your waist,
Thick with childbearing, not for modern taste.
My father thought you lewd and flicked your buttocks.

One giddy night, blonde Susan tipped your stand—
You, true to your best style, lost your head.
You just won't learn how much smart girls will shed
This year. Well, we must both look secondhand.

Lady, we've cost each other. Still, it's been
Lovelier than I would have dared ask here:
My own house, my own woman, this whole year—
Lovelier than things will likely be again:

The handmade rough old farmhouse, out of sight
In overgrowth, in spruce and scrubby pines,
In lilac, in sumac, in the wild grape vines,
And arborvitae on the lawn upright;

The tulips rising from forgotten beds,
Our welcome mat springing up green in clover,
Great maples scattering their winged seeds over
The chicken houses, the abandoned sheds

And the old barn, rotten, tremulous with owls,
The unpruned orchard, rank in its own mash,
Where pheasants nest, orioles fight and flash,
And evenings, silently, the groundhog prowls.

Now, of course, we have to move again
And leave the old house roughhewn as we found it,
The wild meadows and unworked fields around it—
No doubt it would have spoiled us to remain.

We'll leave our kittens, tagged for the new tenants;
The mother cat we couldn't bear to spay;
We'll take the dog along to give away
To someone who can pay for his dependents.

We'll leave the bunting and the scarlet tanagers
Here for the ladies' clubs, for our kind neighbours
Who know enough to get more from their labors,
Meet the right people or be better managers.

Already you can see them through the trees—
The bulldozed lots where men will pass their lives
In glossy houses kept by glossy wives
That have no past or future, but will please

The company. They go for the main chance,
But always save the weekend for their passions;
They dress just far enough behind the fashions
And think right thoughts; they keep it in their pants.

Lady, we are going to have another child.
Was that the one thing you could send us, Lady?
You've brought us poverty enough already.
And *that* goes with us. Well, we are reconciled

Almost; almost. It's not smart, I suppose,
And where do we go now? We fume and worry;
We still just can't quite make ourselves feel sorry.
You've had these troubles; you know how it goes.

We'll try to live with evils that we choose,
Try not to envy someone else's vices,
But make the most of ours. We picked our crisis;
We'll lose the things we can afford to lose

And lug away what's left in orange crates:
Our driftwood, milkweed pods and Christmas cones,
A silver spoon Grandmother left, brook stones
Our daughters painted for my paperweights,

Snapshots, letters, the jimcracks that belong
To the children, the yellowing books we've read
For bedtime, and our own secondhand bed.
And you, Lady—we're taking you along.

Mementos I

Sorting out letters and piles of my old
Cancelled checks, old clippings, and yellow note cards
That meant something once, I happened to find
Your picture. *That* picture. I stopped there cold,
Like a man raking piles of dead leaves in his yard
Who has turned up a severed hand.

Yet, that first second, I was glad: you stand
Just as you stood—shy, delicate, slender,
In the long gown of green lace netting and daisies
That you wore to our first dance. The sight of you stunned
Us all. Our needs seemed simpler, then;
And our ideals came easy.

Then through the war and those two long years
Overseas, the Japanese dead in their shackles
Among dishes, dolls, and lost shoes—I carried
This glimpse of you, there, to choke down my fear,
Prove it had been, that it might come back.
That was before we got married.

—Before we drained out one another's force
With lies, self-denial, unspoken regret
And the sick eyes that blame; before the divorce
And the treachery. Say it: before we met.
Still, I put back your picture. Someday, in due course,
I will find that it's there still.

Mementos II

I found them there today
in the third floor closet,
packed away
among our wedding gifts
under the thick deposit

of black coal dust that sifts
down with the months:
that long white satin gown
and the heavy lead-foil crown
that you wore once
when you were Queen of the May,
the goddess of our town.

You stood, exquisite, tall,
that brilliant hour,
for the imperious Power
that drives and presses all
seed and the buried roots
to rise from the dead year.
I saw your hair,
the beauty that would fall
to the boy who won you. Today,
I wondered where,
in what dark, your wedding suit
lies packed away.

How proud I was to gain you!
No one could warn
me of the pride or of
the fear my love might stain you
that would turn your face to scorn—
of the fear you could not love
that would tease and whine and haunt you
till all that made me want you
would gall you like a crown
of flowering thorn.
My love hung like a gown
of lead that pulled you down.

I saw you there once, later—
the hair and the eyes dull,
a grayness in the face—
a woman with a daughter
alone in the old place.

Only desires remain:
for the times when the right boys sought you;
to be courted, like a girl.
I thought of our years; thought you
had had enough of pain;
thought how much grief I'd brought you;
I wished you well again.

On My Child's Death

From Eichendorff's "Auf Meines Kindes Tod" (8)

Clocks strike in the distance,
Already the night grows late,
How dimly the lamp glistens;
Your bed has been made.

It is the wind goes, only,
Grieving around the house;
Where, inside, sitting lonely,
We listen, often, out.

It is as if, how lightly,
You must be going to knock,
Had missed your way and might be
Tired, now, coming back.

We are poor, poor stupid folk!
It is we who must still roam
Lost in dread of the dark—
You've long found your way home.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE

Apologies to Creston

As I remember there were other travelers too
but no communication. At 2 p.m. and about 102°
there was a Burlington transcontinental in the station,

stainless steel, gleaming under noon gold. We, there alighting
from our tired Chevrolet, as at the wellside in the antique desert,
sought the oasis shade and the water: we, carrying

enough money to feed us and our car and get home
and no more; carrying the fragments of prairie travel, of last night
slept on the sidewalk in front of the church, next the weed patch,

somewhere nameless in Nebraska on U.S. 6; now ventured
the little metropolis, and in the shining drugstore assimilated
glutinous malts and sundaes; and all about us the sweet-and-pretty

of a model town freshened, pressed starched and crisp, as for a wedding
or garden party; and we, shabby at the eyes from little sleep, not well
shaved, dry and hairy, foreign matter in their green lettuce.

How can we pick the towns and stops in the passage
of our life, stick each one like a bug on a pin, assemble
a string and show them to our dinner guests? Yet of these stuffs we are
made.

And even of ours, they; despite disapprovals; and if only
as something once under a fingernail or combed out
of an eyebrow. No communication. But there we are.

Forward then toward evening, and the meal in the wayside weeds,
and the horse opera from the dashboard into late hours, which finally
tumbled us into a campground tented with boy scouts, somewhere near
Keokuk,

and another day gone, and in the middle of it the unshared oasis.
Now on the map, unequivocally between Red Oak
and Chariton, find the name: Creston, Iowa; and hope we have not
been rude.

Remember Aphrodite

Do you remember, Aphrodite, the sea
hours we had; sun gone green in water
lapping over knees; the stare of the offshore
boats at the beachward bodies bare
in the daystar beat and noon glare?
Do you remember arms hesitant, given,
squeeze in the sun; the long day divided between
us (oh, Aphrodite, remember heaven);
hung between memory and fancy of future, in the still
air of our day owned in the sun and the sea?

Red froth, shameward parts of the body dismembered, blue
pain in the loins slapped out seaward, spittle
and waste in the slipwash grew
you at the fury of the heart enfoamed, chaste and bare
o brittle divinity broken into beauty
regathered there in the huge eyes, white stand,
dark-hair-enwimpled grace
of girl imagined in brain eye and hand.

And oh, remember Aphrodite, the shell
under your swimming feet, cool and all
alone on the long water. And lest our days
now in the gathering of gray, years drying on
us, gleam gone from the pools
and the light lost on the sea,
lest they inch us out and confuse, I hold the idol true
in the eye; so also you
deep in the hollow of your dream
Aphrodite remember me.

Goodbye Summer Goodbye Goodbye

Like dolls on their little mile
of sand they walked, hand
closed on a finger of hand,
in a silent struggle of doubt
of the facts of love. And they did,
and they thought; and it all went out.
A tick of a watch, and it slid
and was gone for good and all,
though glance cut through glance and smile
and gray gaze to incise
love's effigy in the air
of the mind, fix there
forever the facts of eyes,
the skinfeel, the circumstance
of marriage, the stuff
of the act that slips away.
To remember will be enough
if we can remember today.

But it's gone, it won't stay.

The composition was hard:
the lighthouse, strict as a fact
on the dwindling spit, and the round
rock in the silver slip, and the packed
sand gritting the heel
of the hand, and the stiff pines
stuck in the rocks, and the sound
of the harbor buoy beating over
water, and gulls in the air
gray circles, and lover and lover
walking like dolls on their lines.
Oh, pin, nail, fasten the pic-
ture sketched in the gray of the mind,
if there's only a paper bag, a stick
of wood for tomorrow to find.

But it's all gone blind, gone blind.

No, out there, in a wheel
of gulls over the scum
on the gray water, it's real,
it's true, some-
thing tossing, a chip
in the tide, a splinter, a peel
of rind, or a sunk ship
floating a bone in the air.
It was real, it was true somehow,
it was there, it was there.
Gone in the gray now.

It's over. You can go home now.

A Siding Near Chillicothe

From the high deck of Santa Fe's El Capitan
cabs, sand-domes, stacks were seen above the box-car line:
old locomotives parked, antedeluvian

in cruel progress, gone before us to that night
toward which we, sacks of memories, slide in blander airs,
and streamline our old eyes and thoughts from glass and flight.

Our ears, boys' ears, and eyes and hearts were haunted by
huge hoots of laughter down the dark: the glow: the steam
bulging in black and red up the spark-shotten sky.

Now wheels, rails rust together, dews and sunshine eat
the iron grace: through silence their corrosion ticks
and drops in red dust, junk of grandeurs obsolete.

So, like old elephants who stumbled off to die
in their known place, and rot their bulks from ivory bones,
the locomotives stood against the prairie sky.

THEODORE ROETHKE

Her Dream

I went down to the river
In the mild light of the moon;
The willows wrapped around me
All the smells of middle June;
But when I sighed and raised my eyes,
The scene had fled and gone.

I had a dream—would you believe?—
I dreamt about a horse;
A lion bit an adder;
I cried out in remorse;
I was driving up a mountain
When the car went in reverse.

My backwheels hung far over
A gully dark and wide;
It seemed an entrance made for me:
I took myself inside,
And there I saw, straight up an aisle,
A bridegroom and a bride.

The guests rose up to stretch their knees
And see what they could see:
The burly bridegroom had a look
Of dour perplexity;
The bride, poor naked shivering shape—
I swear she looked like me.

The parson frowned; he hemmed and hawed;
He fumbled with his book;
And every face, it looked at me
With the same sneery look;
When I tried to cover up myself,
I stood there, and shook.

But suddenly the chancel cracked
 With a jagged lightning stroke;
 The pillars streaked with balls of fire;
 There was a smell of smoke;
 The bells began to ring themselves
 Before the heavens broke.

The rain came down, the rain came down,
 The bride and bridegroom kneeled;
 Then all the guests ran naked out
 Upon a shimmery field
 To dance and sing. And the bridegroom sighed
 As my lips began to yield.

The Motion

- I The soul has many motions, body one.
 An old wind-tattered butterfly flew down
 And pulsed its wings upon the dusty ground—
 Such stretchings of the spirit make no sound.
 By lust alone we keep the mind alive,
 And grieve into the certainty of love.
- II Love begets love. This torment is my joy.
 I watch a river wind itself away;
 To meet the world, I rise up in my mind;
 I hear a cry and lose it on the wind.
 What we put down, must we take up again?
 I dare embrace. By striding, I remain.
- III Who but the loved know love's a faring-forth?
 Who's old enough to live?—a thing of earth
 Knowing how all things alter in the seed
 Until they reach this final certitude,
 This reach beyond this death, this act of love
 In which all creatures share, and thereby live.

- IV Wings without feathers creaking in the sun,
 The close dirt dancing on a sunless stone
 God's night and day: down this space He has smiled,
 O who would take the vision from the child?—
 Hope has its hush: we move through its broad day,—
 O, motion, O, our chance is still to be !

Dirge

(After a Betrayal of Confidence)

O what I say, and without end,
 Burns me the true cigar,
 A kiss as cold as my best friend,
 A smoke without a tar;
 I wrote a book, "Words for the Wind,"—
 My whole undoing's there.

When last is first, my final fiend,
 Old Jupiter's least tear
 Becomes a wave, engulfing who
 Cries for the right true end.

Last night I lay alone and cold,
 Cold, cold my sweetheart's toes,
 I was alone, old, old, old,—
 For I was one of those,
 Who thought that promises, once told,
 Were pure as Joseph's clothes.

Which way, which way, my dear friend cried,
 Cold on my sweetheart's toes,—
 And all his random cries in vain,
 For he was one of those;
 Only the empty air did hear
 That howling, so obscene.

WILLIAM EMPSON

The Satan of Milton

THIS SUBJECT has become confused by a swing of opinion about larger subjects, and I think can be made much simpler by looking firmly at the text, though the process has to be a bit long. I readily agree that the Victorian attitude to Milton's Satan, that he was all right in some kind of double-talk way, because he was an artist or something, is too muddling; but I think the reaction against it has deluded many people into thinking that Milton is simply a bad author, a view which they then often defend by rather irrelevant arguments about his style. The first point to get clear, I think, is that Milton regularly (every time for Satan, Eve, Adam, and Delilah) presents a Fall as due to an intellectually interesting temptation, such that a cool judge may feel actual doubt whether the fall was not the best thing to do in the circumstances. Milton could not otherwise become seriously interested in the case, or feel that it was worthy of his powers; and the effect is that he would see much more point in the views of Blake and Shelley than a modern "historically-minded" critic feels permitted to suppose. The case of Satan comes first in the epic, and has long been thought the most interesting, but we know least about it; his period of decision is presented indirectly, if at all, and its background is hard for us to envisage. We need therefore to make deductions from what the supernatural characters let drop about what happened earlier, much as we would in a play by Ibsen; whereas most critics just assume that Milton regarded the story as obvious, and made the devils tell lies. I should think that, having written both history and propaganda, he would feel himself fairly well equipped to estimate what kind of truth lay behind the traditional propaganda of the devils.

A reader may shrink from the prospect of ingenious misinterpretation thus opened before him, but I can claim to start by removing an unnecessary "problem" which has been much muddled over. Sir Walter Raleigh, in a fine sentence (*Milton*, 1900), remarked that Satan's "very situation as the fearless antagonist of Omnipotence made him either a fool or a hero, and Milton is far indeed from permitting us to think him a fool." This has led to discussion on the basis "Hero or Fool?" (the title of an essay by Sir Rostrevor Hamilton which makes

a number of good points); but until Satan is in sight of Paradise he is convinced that God is *not* omnipotent. Then, very dramatically, "horror and doubt distract / His troubled thoughts" (IV.20). I maintain that he does not doubt the thesis he keeps asserting till the poem tells us he does; surely this is not an over-subtle theory. Raleigh's remark was sympathetic, because Milton does want to make Satan a very high-flying character, and sometimes uses ambiguous language to heighten the drama. But not all the rebel angels are heroic, and they all think as Satan does; we first meet them in Book I astonished to find God able to send them to Hell, and even yet doubting his omnipotence. Satan no more set out to attack omnipotence than Belial did, and if he had done Belial would not have followed him.

We are told at the start that Satan "trusted to have equal'd the Most High" (40), and he says in his first words, by way of excusing the defeat of the rebels,

till then who knew
The force of those dire arms? (95)

They knew, of course, as rebels usually do, that they might be defeated and were risking severe reprisals; thus Beelzebub in his reply says that Satan

Fearless, endangered Heav'ns perpetual king;
And put to proof his high Supremacy,
Whether upheld by Strength, or Chance, or Fate . . . (130)

If he *endangered* God, the rule of God is not inherently *perpetual*; Milton would intend the words as a slight contradiction which the speaker does not know how to resolve. In the same way, the rebels often call God "Almighty," but I need only show that they give an ordinary meaning to the English word; Milton might intend to write "on two levels" about such matters, if only to reassure his simpler readers, but even if he didn't the language would make it hard to avoid. Among men, it would be correct to call an opponent "all-powerful" meaning "able to defeat any opposing combination in battle" though he were not a magician; and such is all Beelzebub can mean by saying he is now sure God is Almighty, since he has beaten "such force as ours" (145); because he adds at once that God can't kill the rebels, who are "Gods and Heavenly Essences" like himself. The goodness of God is not much denied by the rebels, because the idea hardly occurs to them; Beelzebub goes on to suspect, what Milton tells us to be true,

that God has allowed them to recover consciousness merely to give them further torture. What they do not yet realise is that his infinite malice cannot be outwitted. The analytic mind of Satan, however, in his answering speech, does consider the question of God's goodness; he says that his side, however impotent otherwise, will from now on do ill to oppose the good works of God (160). This may seem embarrassing for his defenders; it is hard to regard him as ironical here, and Shelley would perhaps have said that Milton was pandering to his audience for a moment. "Good" was evidently one of the titles assumed by God, like "Almighty"; Satan actually says "he Almighty styled," though not till IX. 140, while jeering at God for having taken a week to create the world. Thus one may regard this act of verbal defiance as pathetically innocent, though terrible, because Satan when he makes it does not know what doing ill feels like, though God will make him learn. He was technically not ignorant of good and evil before his Fall (XI. 85), as Adam and Eve were, but one would expect he was comparatively ignorant of them. There is at any rate a heavy dramatic irony in the next lines, when Satan hopes that this procedure

perhaps

Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb

His inmost counsels from their destin'd aim. (I. 165)

Milton steadily drives home that the inmost counsel of God was the Fortunate Fall of man; however wicked Satan's plan may be, it is God's plan too.

On reaching land and observing Hell Satan makes a third grand speech, still only to his intimate Beelzebub, so that it is not merely propaganda for his troops. He welcomes any privation rather than endure the presence of God,

Whom reason hath equall'd, force hath made supreme

Above his equals. (250)

It has been clear from the start that some kind of metaphysical claim against God is the basis of Satan's actions, but here we get the first of a number of hints, cumulatively strong, that he had held an actual debate on the rights of God, for senior members of his staff probably, before the crisis which made him call them out for immediate military action. One can suppose instead that he is forcing his case here, and means only that his army accepted the arguments which he gave them in a brief speech after mobilization; and I agree of course that he is very

prone to mis-statement after reaching Niphates top; but these early phrases fit together more naturally if God's "equals" have exercised their reason together, as Parliament did against Charles I.

Satan too calls God "Almighty" here, but Milton expects the reader to impute a tone of irony, because Satan is retorting upon God a familiar accusation against himself; he may also mean to express doubt whether God created Hell, but in any case he sneers at the metaphysical meaning of "Almighty" while accepting the common one:

th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence. (260)

I am not denying, what Milton regularly asserts, that Satan fell out of pride and envy; but as Satan believes God to be a usurper he genuinely does believe him to be envious. As soon as we waive our metaphysical presumptions, we easily recognise that the motivation will be complex as in human affairs. In another case, resisting Charles I for example, the emotional forces actuating Satan could have made him work for the public good with increasingly public-spirited sentiments. As has often been pointed out, he is in the wrong solely because of an intellectual error; and we are ill-equipped to feel certain that we ourselves, in his place, would have decided rightly from the right motives.

His next act is to rouse the other rebels from the lake (320), and his scolding presumes a military situation in which they should be ready to defend themselves, hence that their foe is not all-powerful. In addressing them when risen (625) he at once calls God "Almighty"; but he cannot intend the metaphysical sense of the word, because he congratulates them on having stood against him for a time. I grant indeed that the effect is quieter than before; after getting them to rise with the bark of a sergeant-major, he has now to coax and comfort them; and the assurance that he won't lead them to another direct assault upon God is necessary to give them enough courage for other activities. (We do not much notice the change of tone because the splendid description of pagan gods comes in between.) But part of their comfort is that they can be proud of the War in Heaven; "that strife/Was not inglorious, though the event was dire." We find later that Satan is gently recalling here what he had pressed strongly during the War in Heaven; indeed it is the most definite theoretical argument of the rebels against the claims of God (VI. 425). If they can fight against him for three days, that is enough to prove that he has not got absolute or metaphysical power; he is not the God of Aquinas; therefore he has

been cheating them, and, however powerful he may be, to submit to him would be dishonourable. Milton does not treat this argument as absurd; his story indeed rebuts it, but at the cost of implying that God intentionally deluded Satan. God says that he delayed his victory to prove to the loyal angels the unique powers of the Son (VI. 700); however, as God knows all consequences, he must also have known that these tactics would make Satan argue as he does.

We may now consider the chains, which Mr. Eliot could not make a picture of. I agree that they are probably a metaphor for another means of immobilization; probably material chains could not even now hold Satan, who can still make himself any size he likes, though God has imposed some grave change on the half-gaseous nature of the rebels. Whatever the chains are, we are left in no doubt what happens to them; they hold for nine days, including the seven of Creation (but not the following day, when Adam woke up in Paradise, VIII. 245), and then God deliberately removes them:

So stretched out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay
 Chain'd on the burning lake; nor ever thence
 Had risen nor heav'd his head, but that the will
 And high fore-knowledge of all-ruling Heav'n
 Left him at large to his own dark designs
 That with reiterated crimes he might
 Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
 Evil to others, and enrag'd might see
 How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
 Infinite goodness, grace and mercy show'n
 On man by him seduc'd, but on himself
 Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour'd (I. 210)

Here we are specifically told that God's actions towards Satan were intended to lead him into greater evil; thus we have no reason to doubt that God had previously intended to give Satan a wrong metaphysical argument when he made the War in Heaven last three days. It may still be thought that there is a confusion about the chains when Satan decides to rise from the flood:

But see the angry Victor hath recall'd
 His Ministers of vengeance and pursuit . . . (170)

Satan remembers for ten lines what happened while they were falling from Heaven, and ignores the chains altogether. But he also imagines

that the pursuing troops have only just been recalled; the rebels are as if emerging from a drug, and remember nothing of the intervening nine days. Indeed Moloch, after more time for reflection, specifically says they were under a drug:

Let such bethink them, if the sleepy drench
Of that forgetful Lake benumb not still . . . (II. 75)

Already when Satan and Beelzebub rise Milton explains to us that they are in a delusion:

Both glorying to have scapt the Stygian Flood
As Gods, and by their own recover'd strength
Not by the sufferance of supernal power. (I. 240)

All the same, one can understand how the long sentence explaining God's intention in removing the chains might seem best interpreted as "only music." God's infinite mercy to Man pokes up in one line merely so that Milton can swoop to the kill at the end of the sentence; he patently does not feel the doctrine just then as anything but one more boast about God's triumph over Satan. Modern Christians, very properly, tend to dislike reading the line as a shrill high war-whoop before launching the tomahawk, so they feel that the only decent way to read it must be "dead-pan."

I have delayed considering the first utterance of Satan because I do not believe it can be read aloud properly unless you realise what it means. The belief that he has proved God not to be omnipotent is so rooted in his mind that, as soon as he emerges from the drug, we find it already permeating almost every clause of his defiance; and this is what decides the emphases, so that you are not even getting the sound of the poetry if you refuse to see the point of it:

that fixt mind
And high disdain, from sense of injur'd merit,
That with the mightiest rais'd me to contend,
And to the fierce contention brought along
Innumerable force of spirits arm'd
That durst dislike his reign, and me preferring,
His *utmost* power with *adverse* power *oppos'd*
In *dubious* battle on the *plains* of Heav'n,
And *shook* his throne. What though the field be lost? (100)

—that is unimportant beside winning the proof that his cause is just.

Opponents in this controversy have often jeered at my side for being so romantic as to believe the Father of Lies; but the idea which first appears in his mind as he recovers consciousness is also the first that he presents in his formal address to his troops—an impressive degree of sincerity, in a politician. Surely it is the modern orthodox here, and not my faction, who are unnecessarily puzzling their heads and thereby spoiling the poem.

However, I must not fall into arguing that, unless you accept my theory, you cannot appreciate the speech; that would be absurd because it has such a powerful direct impact. While I was refugeeing with the Combined North-East China Universities in 1938 or '39 I was kindly asked to do my bit at a sing-song, as the only Englishman present though not quite the only European, and found I remembered enough of this passage. It was received with fierce enthusiasm, but also with a mild groan from some of the older hands, who felt they had been having enough propaganda already. I am not sure how familiar it would be with that audience, but I know at least that it goes over as a direct political speech, which is what Mr. Eliot said the style of Milton could not do. This audience, you understand, really did mean to resist to the end however powerless, exactly like Satan and with the same pride in it; also, not being Christian, they would not require a separate theological argument before they could sympathize with him. To follow the story as a whole, one needs to realise that Satan's argument would be correct if God had not given him a false premise; but a normal reader of the speech does not need this idea, because he vaguely invents enough background to justify the emphases which the rhetoric and the music require. I only maintain that our recent pious critics, eager to catch Satan out on a technicality all the time, must be unable to read his speeches aloud.

There is something so confidently low-minded about their position that I had better insert a reflection on the Gamble of Pascal. He argued, while more or less inventing the mathematics of Probability, that, since the penalties for disbelief in Christianity are infinitely horrible and enduring, therefore, if there is any probability however tiny (but finite) that the assertions of the religion are true, a reasonable man will endure any degree of pain and shame on earth (since this is known beforehand to be finite) on the mere chance that the assertions are true. The answer is political not mathematical; this argument makes Pascal the slave of any person, professing any doctrine, who has

the impudence to tell him a sufficiently extravagant lie. A man ought therefore to be prepared to reject such a calculation; and I feel there has been a strange and unpleasant moral collapse during my own lifetime, because so many of our present literary mentors not only accept it but talk as if that was a moral thing to do. Clearly, if you have reduced your morality to keeping the taboos imposed by an infinite malignancy, you can have no sense either of personal honour or of the public good; but one finds this same neo-Christian tone complacently adopted even by writers who do not pretend to believe in the religion—they regard it simply as a general moral truth that one ought to tell lies in favour of the side which is sure to win. But Milton's devils do not; the sources and extent of God's rights and power are for them a matter still under debate, so that they are exactly in the position Pascal envisaged; and they assume that to obey God merely out of cowardice, while his rule becomes increasingly harsh, certain that his demands are unreasonable but not that he could carry out his threats, would be gross dishonour. Their position is thus identical with that of persons such as Milton who had dared to deny that Charles I had Divine Right; identical morally, though Milton believes that God actually had it and Charles hadn't. Whether the rebels deserve blame for their initial doubt of God's credentials, before God had supplied false evidence to encourage the doubt, is hard for us to tell; but once they have arrived at a conviction they are not to be blamed for having the courage to act upon it. I hope I will not be told that this moral doctrine is sentimental because it was invented by Shelley; it has been an essential bit of equipment since the human mind was first evolved.

Such then is the basic situation as the poem opens, and we gradually learn more about how this problem for the rebels arose. Going back to Satan's address to his troops, he says that God

Sat on his Throne, upheld by old repute
Consent or custom, and his regal State
Put forth at full, but still his strength conceal'd
Which tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall. (I. 640)

A reader who has completed the later Books can hardly deny that this is true; and presumably the comfort of the reflection, though Satan is mainly concerned to win their hearts with the pathos of the thing, is that such tricky behaviour is not what one would expect of total Omnipotence; so that there is probably yet hope of circumventing God by trickery, as is being proposed.

In Book II we have the debate of the rebel leaders, and can learn their general state of opinion. Satan's introductory address claims leadership under "the fixt laws of Heav'n" but also from their free choice of his merit, and prophecies that, having learned in adversity

firm accord
More than can be in Heav'n, we now return
To claim our just inheritance of old . . . (35)

Some critics have argued that Milton intended this boast as an evidently farcical one, because it confesses that the devils would quarrel as soon as they began to succeed, so that their moral corruption makes all planning inherently hopeless for them; other critics have answered that it is a passable sophistry from a defeated commander, and though nonsense would not entail loss of epic dignity. I think all this greatly under-rates our general human readiness to interpret paradoxes if we want to, let alone the Renaissance concentration upon paradoxes. Satan is talking in a high Roman manner. Consider the good Duke in *As You Like It*, who is greatly admired for praising the benefits of exile; nobody is surprised at his returning to his dukedom as soon as possible, because he was always considered to be expressing a noble paradox. After the conference, the rebels praise with free reverence the virtue of Satan; they "extol him equal to the highest in Heaven," thus denying the unique goodness of the Father, because "for the general safety he despised/His own" (480); and well they may, as Milton has made this scene of choice a detailed parallel to the self-sacrifice of the Son in the next Book. Not content with structure, he drives the point home by a personal comment, no doubt intending blame to the leaders of the Commonwealth:

O shame to men! Devil with devil damn'd
Firm concord holds, men only disagree
Of creatures rational . . . (500)

The force and music of the poetry here prove that he had been feeling this pent-up comment deeply. As a matter of theory, he says that they have not yet lost all the effulgence of God's presence (or not yet been corrupted by God's plans for them), but also he does not feel that they are as yet at all contemptible. However, there is a more general puzzle about the debate. Satan never claims that they remember a time before God usurped, though his argument seems to require it; indeed, we know they do not, from his reply to Abdiel in V. 860—"We know no

time when we were not as now.” It merely seems to them reasonable to claim that order and justice are older than any individual ruler. The first readers would look at the text very politically, seeing parallels to recent English history; no doubt they would think of the rebels as like historians under Charles I praising our freedom under the Anglo-Saxon monarchy. However, this weakness in Satan’s argument need not make him look absurd; how God managed to usurp we never hear the rebels discuss, but we are encouraged to think that they have already done so. Milton could hardly be expected to give a fuller account.

Moloch then argues that they had better fight God with “his own invented torments,”

Turning our Tortures into horrid Arms

Against the Torturer

(II. 65)

because *either* this will force God to destroy them, so that he can no longer torture them, *or*, “if our substance be indeed divine” so that the soi-disant God can’t destroy them, then

we are at worst

On this side nothing . . .

(100)

and to continue to “disturb” and “alarm” him “if not Victory is yet Revenge.” This has been called merely savage, but it is not if you add the usual metaphysical assumptions of the rebels, which Moloch as a plain soldier leaves to his audience. If the rebels prove that they are not nothing in comparison to God then they have disproved God’s absolute claims, and to remind him for ever that he is known to be false would be a moral victory. Moloch can fairly be supposed to mean this because he is clear about the theoretical alternative under discussion; either the rebels have a similar status to God, or they have been wrong in deciding so, and had best seek death.

Belial then counsels prudence; he admits that God is “incorruptible” against attack, which might seem to give up the whole case, but we soon find him using the same chemical metaphors (“our purer essence” etc., 215) about the rebels themselves; this makes clear that he merely thinks the two equal groups should arrange co-existence. In between these passages he has made what might seem a deeper admission:

To suffer, as to do,

Our strength is equal, nor the Law unjust

That so ordains: this was at first resolv’d,

If we were wise, against so great a foe

Contending, and so doubtful what might fall.

(200)

But this does not entail that he yields on the essential point; he need not mean that this just law is God's law, so that justice is inherently on God's side. Drawing as usual upon the classics for the thoughts of devils, Milton has him say that they have been defeated by "fate inevitable," some kind of law of Nature which may be prior to God, though it happens to endorse "the Victor's will"; indeed this basic law of the universe is perhaps merely *vae victis*. I do not know what he thinks their strength is able to do, and perhaps Lawyer Belial is merely appeasing the pride of General Moloch in this turn of language; but a human reader is bound to be interested when he points out that fallen angels have "strength equal to suffer" Hell, or can go on arguing there at any rate, because we gather that mankind have not. *If we were wise* has a curious effect; the lawyer, as so often among men, doubts whether the other members of the committee understood the position sufficiently clearly when they "first resolved," and this I think makes almost certain that they have held a previous debate while yet in Heaven. Belial also believes that God's eye is all-seeing (190), though he hardly can have believed it when he attended this earlier conference; probably he then thought it merely part of God's propaganda, and has become convinced of it by subsequent events. Even so, it says a great deal for the strength of the anti-God party in Heaven that a sober lawyer like Belial was prepared to join it. His last word is that something else may turn up, as they are going to live for ever; Milton remembers here the classical Supreme Gods who were eventually eaten by their sons, and indeed the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus. As he maintained that these devils eventually became known to men as the pagan gods, he would think it right to draw on pagan legend as evidence for what devils thought about the cosmos.

Mammon comes next, and seems to me only to remove a false glimmer of hope by saying that Fate is "everlasting." As a matter of the effect on the reader, I think he makes rather clearer that Fate is conceived as distinct from the Will of God, but this does not prove that Belial had meant otherwise. Professor C. S. Lewis wrote a splendid chapter on the whole debate, challenging you to invent four speeches each more morally insane than the last, so he argued that Mammon is worse than Belial; but all this presumes that the rebels know they are in the wrong. I think Milton just wanted two reasonable-sounding speeches in favour of peace, before the dramatic shock of Satan's plan for secret war. The moral interest of Mammon's speech, which the lawyer Belial could not provide, comes from saying that God is personally so disgusting that the

rebels could not endure to return to "splendid vassalage" under him, even if allowed to (250). Mammon I take it is a tycoon or industrialist; he is convinced he can make Hell as good as Heaven, and points out that they already greatly resemble one another. Take darkness; God for his plots frequently wraps himself in darkness, whereas we scientists in Hell already sit brilliantly illuminated. We have

Magnificence; and what can Heav'n show more? (270)

The eerie thing here is that Milton's Heaven evidently does show hardly anything more; and when Mammon goes straight on to remark that their "torments" are bound to become gradually less he at least shows a staggering amount of cool courage. C. S. Lewis treats him as a sensualist fighting down his pangs of shame—"Honour? Love? Everybody I meet salutes me, and there is an excellent brothel round the corner." But Milton tells us that one of the chief pains of Hell, as in human prisons, was deprivation of sex, if it may be so called (IV. 510); God had made their substance thicken just enough to keep them from their pleasure of total interpenetration. To be sure, the rebels could not have foreseen this, but there is no suggestion that they chose revolt to gain pleasure; they did it on a point of honour, or if we need a derogatory term, out of pride. It is true that they are being driven into moral absurdity, calculated to make their characters rot away; I think that this turns the grand sermon of C. S. Lewis into a denunciation of Milton's God. But a reader does not need to agree with the devils before he can understand what they say; surely there is no critical merit in belittling the whole story, though it was intended to be very sublime, by refusing to envisage the situation of angels who have become convinced that their God is bad.

It is convenient to deal here with the Sixth Book, recounting the War in Heaven, which bears out this argument but is otherwise tiresomely absurd. God invents pain, for bad angels only, and it cannot subdue them; they are impressively superior to the good ones. What can war have meant before, with no death, and bodies which can leak out of any hold? Both sides wear armour though they can turn themselves into gas (350); this must be unusually stupid Science Fiction, and I can't see much evidence for the view that Milton thought it funny. The recent objections to the style of *Paradise Lost* seem to me wrong-headed when Milton is using it to say something real, but they do apply to the Sixth Book. All the same, we get a consistent account of the rebel theory. After the first day of fighting, Satan argues to his troops that

they have already disproved the metaphysical claims of God, in that he has not defeated them at once:

then fallible, it seems,
Of future we may deem him, though till now
Omniscient thought . . . (VI. 430)

The obvious deduction is that God is not omnipotent ("if one day, why not Eternal days?"), but Satan throws in a claim that his infinite foreknowledge has also been disproved, which tells us that the rebels have at least heard of it. Nisroc, a rather difficult General, then says that he won't put up with God's invention of pain unless Satan invents something back, which turns out to be gunpowder; but even he addresses Satan as

Delivrer from new Lords, leader to free
Enjoyment of our right as Gods (450)

so that even this rather untheoretical type accepts the basic claim of Satan's faction, that God is cheating the angels out of their equal status with him. We tend to think of Satan as a djinn emerging from a bottle, but when put back into the society which voted for him he makes a different impression. He thinks of more arguments than the other malcontents do, but along the lines they want; so that he need not be considered to fall through a unique craving to gratify his own vanity.

Returning to the debate in Pandemonium, Beelzebub rounds off the discussion by a speech arranged with Satan beforehand to swing the council into voting that Satan shall go to Eden alone. Some eager critics have called this dirty of Satan, but a reader accustomed to committee-work would recognise that he had been too proud to lobby, and that his moral standing turned out strong enough for him to get his way without it. To arrange with his known friend to propose his plan, and then speak for it himself at once, was not underhand behaviour.

Beelzebub says that God promised to create the World and Man with an oath that shook all Heaven, and that this was "ancient" (II. 350); whereas Satan has recalled a recent rumour in Heaven that the creation which threatens the hierarchy will occur "ere long" (I. 650); then Satan tells Sin that "concurring signs" make him believe the prophecy already fulfilled (II. 830). The three accounts are consistent, especially as God gives other "signs" in the last two Books; and we may still believe that God created us to spite the devils,

because he would always foreknow that he would some day want to. The only problem is whether this rumour arose after the promotion of the Son or before. There would be no occasion for it after, during the War in Heaven, when their minds are fully occupied with a different case of promotion over their heads; the more statesmanlike view is that the angels began buzzing with rumours and interpreting "signs" as soon as God named the date for the grand Summons at which he promoted the Son.

The narrative of Sin has often been dismissed as "allegorical," but I have never read any evidence that Milton could think an epic entitled to include an allegorical bit making assertions about previous events which can be ignored. He encourages the reader to be interested in what happened before, after beginning with Homeric abruptness at a crisis; and I expect you would have found the blind man very irritable if you said to him "Presumably the narrative of Sin can be ignored." Once you accept it, Satan undoubtedly held a council about the claims of God before he revolted; I am merely claiming to show that the poem has let drop a number of hints which should prepare you to accept it. Your mind is expected to rally, with a certain pride, after the surprise of her account; naturally, the real fall of Satan would have happened earlier than the obvious one, as in the case of Macbeth. Little shocks like this for a reader are the standard way in a novel to make him believe in a character.

Sin claims to have been born from Satan's head (like Athena) at an assembly for debating the claims of God (II. 750). This cannot be the assembly of Satan's troops, immediately after the promotion of the Son, because that does not leave enough time. At first, she reminds Satan, the conspirators were afraid of the portent, but later she became a general pet, and

such joy thou took'st
With me in secret, that my womb conceiv'd
A growing burden. Meanwhile War arose . . . (765)

The passage has even more indications of lapse of time. It is rather bad because it makes the biology of the angels too confusing; but it makes clear that Milton regarded this prelapsarian conference of the rebel leaders as a real event in his story, so that we are to regard their theological opinions as fully considered ones.

In Book III, after reaching the sun, Satan disguises himself as a "stripling" cherub to inquire the way to Paradise from Uriel.

Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
 Youth smil'd celestial . . . (640)

This makes a worse, because a much more general, puzzle about the biology of the angels. Satan asserts, as an essential part of his argument (V. 860), that no angel has seen God create an angel, and he goes on to presume that angels are in an argumentative sense "self-begot":

self-rai's'd

By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course
 Had circled his full Orb, the birth mature
 Of this our native Heav'n, ethereal Sons.

A human reader feels certain here that these puzzled creatures do not produce young. The contradiction within the poem of course is what feels bad, not a disagreement with accepted opinion about the mode of production of angels. But one can explain why it seems quite natural. This cherub counts as young because he has recently been promoted to the position, from the vast dim class of proletarian angels who are needed so that angels with titles may issue orders. The defection of a sheer third of the angels, many of them evidently superior ones, would seem to give a unique opportunity for promotion. I have to admit that, if Satan merely removed his entire command as it stood, the other commands would be likely to stand pat; but Raphael's account may be cursory there. The reason why Satan must disguise himself as a "youth" is to avoid suspicion; Uriel is surprised that any of the good angels can be bothered to come and look at the new creation—they are resentful about it, because afraid of having some further promotion made over their heads. But Uriel finds it natural for a promoted proletarian to be a busybody, trying to curry favour no doubt; and this explains the touch of patronage which can be felt in his remarks, even though he genuinely feels that this angel deserves praise. Such a tone cannot be distinguished from treating him as literally a young one.

Satan does this partly to test God's claim to creation, and the truth comes as a great blow to him. Uriel says very impressively "I saw when at his word" the creation happened (III. 710); Satan can no longer think "Space may create new worlds" (I. 650), and it is now more probable that God created Satan too. Such is the end of Book III, and Book IV begins with Satan in despair. Horror, so far from rejoicing or triumph, is what overcomes him as he approaches the scene where he must perform his first really wicked, that is, unkind action; and he is

also said, for the first time, to "doubt." So he must, or he could not think it wicked at all to release our parents from their tyrant. His change of mind may seem natural, but he is a very argufying character and here he leaves a logical gap; he now (though perhaps not later) believes that God created Satan as well as the world. He has thus lost his tremendous bet; the metaphysical claims of God were somehow justified after all, and only harm can follow from the success of his heroic effort.

I think that what convinces him is just the overwhelming beauty of the newly created world. This fills the gap, and the best reason for believing it is the principle of Mr. Rajan, that the virtue celebrated by the poem is sublimity. The scenery of the interior of the sun, a wonderful piece of invention as C. S. Lewis remarked, had been affecting him while he heard the bad news from Uriel, and now he is in sight of Paradise:

Sometimes towards Eden which now in his view
Lay pleasant, his grievd look he fixes sad,
Sometimes towards Heav'n and the full-blazing sun . . .
(IV. 30)

Later, after he has toured the earth including both poles, Milton makes him say

O Earth, how like to Heav'n, if not preferr'd
More justly, Seat worthier of Gods, as built
With second thoughts, reforming what was old:
For what God after better worse would build? (IX. 100)

I am not sure whether Milton or Satan is the stronger authority here, and hardly know which of them is speaking; the blind man, though expecting Heaven, thought we should not allow ourselves to fancy that anything could be more beautiful than the scenery of this world. I have to confess that, on Niphates top, Milton only lets Satan say that he hates the sun, but that is an intelligible way to express his feelings. One should remember that, apart from the development of English nature-poetry, this was the age of the first European landscape-paintings, and Milton was proud of his universal culture and his trip to Italy; he lavished all his power on his descriptions of the newly created world, and such an attitude to Nature was usually regarded as a kind of submerged proof that God had created it. Thus a fit reader might expect Satan to change his mind on this ground; and the idea, as well

as making him consistent, keeps us from spoiling his poetry by thinking him insincere beforehand.

Satan does not discuss his change of mind, being fully occupied with his situation as now viewed. He fell, he says, because he felt God to be a usurer—the gift God made in creating him had appeared to him, perhaps wrongly, as only an initial lump sum, whereas a more generous nature would have accepted endless repayment. No doubt this is true, though expressed with pathetic moderation, of his frame of mind when he first planned to revolt. But he is still certain that it would be useless to submit; he would later recant, he knows, though he does not examine the reason:

For never can true reconciliation grow
Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep: . . .
(*IV. 100*)

indeed, “this knows my punisher”; such is the only point at which he still sounds like accusing God. He again concludes that he will do Evil to spite God’s intention of Good, and this time appears to have some inkling of the meaning of the form of words:

Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least
Divided Empire with Heav’n’s King I hold
By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign;
As Man ere long, and this new World shall know. (*110*)

The sequence is a dreadful one, but his verbal opposition to a titular claim of God cannot decide whether the claim of God is false, which was the point originally at issue. He merely finds himself forced now to take his phrase seriously. Many critics have thought that this speech cannot be reconciled at all with his previous ones; he has become an entirely new character, they say, as if Milton had become alarmed at realising he had made Satan too good. Surely it is only fair to the author to interpret the words so as to make the character consistent, when this is found to be quite possible. The sharpness of the jolt does rather suggest (as his nephew reports) that Milton was fitting in some old material; but he might have judged that the sudden change in Satan’s beliefs needed to be expressed by a jolt.

On the other hand, it is often confidently asserted that this speech admits his previous speeches to have been all lies; a view which makes the character consistent by making him ridiculous, though I think some critics combine it with complaining that he has become a quite

different character. We have not had Satan alone before—he has always been either negotiating with rival powers or encouraging his followers; so this is the first time he could have told us that he regards lying to his followers as a painful duty. I think Milton would realise that the words could be taken like that, but would regard it as a very crude interpretation. It is quite usual in the theatre to have a crude interpretation available so that no one in the audience frets; thus Angelo in *Measure for Measure* is genuinely astonished by his craving for a nun, a fetishism as it would be called now, but if you find this abstruse you can take him as a simple hypocrite. The device is hardly worth calling an ambiguity, and I think it is all that need be imputed in the case of Satan.

Always an extremist, Satan now admits all the claims of God. But “submission,” he goes on,

Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame
Among the spirits beneath, whom I seduc’d
With other promises and other vaunts
Than to submit, boasting I could subdue
Th’Omnipotent. Ay me, they little know
Under what torments inwardly I groan:
While they adore me on the Throne of Hell,
With Diadem and Sceptre high advanc’d
The lower still I fall, only supreme
In misery; such joy Ambition finds. (90)

No doubt this is theatrical, but when C. S. Lewis blames Satan for always talking about himself it is fair to remember that is what his readers always want him to talk about. That he boasted he could defeat God in battle, and found he couldn’t, is no confession because it has been plain to all since the beginning of the epic. That the commander after defeat thought it his duty to express confidence in evasive action, hiding his anxiety, is no confession either; indeed, as he wept in the presence of his troops, we might reflect that he was less stoical than he now claims. The duty, he now feels, tarnished his honesty; and it illustrates, what he now recognises, that being the opponent of a genuine God will drive him morally lower and lower. But the two main verbs separated by a colon make two sentences; thus the words do not say that he knew he was telling any more radical lie while he was being adored. Perhaps Milton is arranging not to disturb a simple-minded

reader, but he would expect a fit one to appreciate his sustained analysis of the character.

Satan then jumps over the wall into Paradise, already watched by Uriel because the passion of his soliloquy has betrayed him. It seems that the idea of a soliloquy being observed has been found absurdly theatrical or literary, so I make bold to remark that it once happened to me. I had landed at Los Angeles on my way from China to England, and there is a park in that city which rises to a fairly bluff summit. I went to the top of it and screamed; this was in 1939, so my feelings need not all be blamed upon Los Angeles. After I had been screaming for a bit I found I was being shot at by boys with air-guns; this satisfied me in some way; I came down the hill and took the train to San Francisco. The incident on Niphates top strikes me as a rather life-like thing to have happened to Satan.

He next soliloquises while perched on the Tree of Life disguised as a cormorant; it is his first view of Adam and Eve, who are romping with an elephant at the time, and he makes the eerie offer to them of all he has:

Hell shall unfold

To entertain you two, her widest gates,
And send forth all her kings. (380)

I would still deny, as I did in my book *Pastoral*, that this is meant only as the leering irony of the stage villain. It may seem absurd to suppose that he could have any good intentions towards them, but the text seems designed to leave the point open. They are pawns in his game, but he may prefer to have them do comfortably once they are on his side. He does not express ill-will towards mankind in his speeches around I. 650 and II. 400, whereas Beelzebub talks very spitefully about us, thinking we may become favourites of God, with an unjust position in the hierarchy, like the Son (II. 370). Satan does allow Sin, Death and Chaos to suppose he intends us harm, vaguely expressed (II. 840, 985), but he would see that as the only way to make them let him pass. God says in III. 90 that Satan will try to destroy or pervert Adam and Eve, "And shall pervert; / For man will hearken to his glozing lies"; but Satan believed in his offers till the very moment when he made them. The speech on Niphates top has no reference to mankind, except to say in the last line that they will soon know his power. His next speech is the one now in question, so we do not reach it with

much evidence that his intentions towards us are bad. He knows indeed that we will suffer bodily pain in Hell, as he and the other rebel angels do; but they can carry on life in a high manner, whereas Milton seems to accept the usual view that we can only remain in passive agony (II. 600). Satan evidently does not know this, and so far the irony of his offer belongs only to the God who made Hell. Satan may well think that it is worth enduring a period of suffering to be on the honest side, as Milton himself would. In his next soliloquy, around IV. 530, he expresses a rather self-indulgent pity for them and says he must bring upon them "death" and "long woes"; but in Milton's world death is a very subtle or almost meaningless term, and they might gain honour in the end as a reward for their long woes. By the way, C. S. Lewis need not have called Satan "a thing which peers in through bathroom windows" because he feels jealous here of the sexual pleasures of Adam and Eve; God has recently cut him off from his own corresponding pleasures, and he is straightforward enough about it. But I agree that his temper has begun to spoil, so that he eyes them "with leer malign"; indeed, his character rots away so fast now that his speech on first view of them is his only really puzzling one. Going by the sound-effects, as one should, the offer of high honour in Hell feels very sincere, or at least he seems genuinely gratified for the moment by his own romantic generosity; though other lines of the speech feel very horrible.

I argued in my book *Pastoral* that Satan is not a consistent character, being something more basically dramatic instead; and this I now think wrong. There was a fashion for attacking "character-analysis," especially in Shakespeare, which I have taken some time to get out of; maybe it has a kind of truth, but it is dangerously liable to make us miss points of character. I would still say, indeed, that there is an unnerving strain here between the two ways of reading the passage; you can either shudder at Satan's villainy or take the offer as sincere, and feel the agony of his ruined greatness. But both are within him; what I had not realized is that he has only just begun to doubt whether he has anything to offer them. He is still partly thinking of himself as a patron of Adam and Eve, who can save them from their wicked master; thus he seems genuinely indignant (IV. 520) at hearing the conditions of ignorance which God has imposed upon them. We could not expect him to stay in the mood of self-abasement reached on Niphates top, accepting all God's claims, especially as even then he still found God intolerable. Thus his reasoning mind may probably be sincere when he offers high honour in Hell; but even as he speaks his

lips are twisted by the new suspicion that God is only waiting to turn all he does to torture. I readily agree that from then on he is rotting away; but also, he rightly suspects that God is plotting to make him rot away; his story is more like the Orwell *1984* than anything else. The poetry of the offer is so haunting that I have long felt it must have meant something important to Milton, though I could not understand what; so I feel confident of this explanation now.

It seems best to consider the later details about Satan at once, which may be done briefly. His final soliloquy is in Book IX, before the Temptation, after going seven times round the world to hide in darkness for a week. His praise of the beauty of the world, though evidence of Milton's intention I think, is used by Satan merely to argue that the world ought not to have been made for such inferior persons; it is great indignity even for conformist angels to have to wait on them, and still more for himself to have to turn into a snake. His self-pity has reached the point of saying "Only in destroying find I ease," and he thinks it will be "glorious" to mar the creation. I fully agree with the disgust felt by C. S. Lewis for Satan's character as it has now become, and could even agree that his doubts about God are now merely a means of deceiving himself. But surely one must also feel horror at the God who has deliberately reduced him to such a condition. He is a less painful sight after the Fall, because totally corrupt and merely the Devil; as when he meets Sin and Death, on his way back to Hell, and urges them forward to enslave and destroy mankind (X. 400). His boastful speech on his return admits that God created the world, though still not that he created the angels. God then turns all the rebels into snakes, thus proving to them that he was only playing cat and mouse all the time; and then of course turns them back, so that they may continue to work upon mankind.

Most critics are now agreed that there is a gradual calculated degradation of Satan, but this bit of understanding gets obscured by a hunger to argue that he is very bad from the start. The chief merit of the shape of the poem, I think, which so many critics have called magnificent architecture, is that it presents the change in Satan with such force. We first meet him certain of the righteousness of his cause though defeated, follow him into doubt and despair, switch back in the narrative of Raphael to find him confident that his cause will be victorious as well as just, then return to the story and find his character rapidly rotting away. As there is no slip-up anywhere in this involved programme, we can at least be sure that it was intended.

Raphael warns Adam and Eve that he is doubtful what it is lawful to tell and what he is capable of expressing to them, then begins abruptly with the summons of all angels before the throne of God to hear the formal appointment of the Son as an absolute ruler; to be obeyed on pain of eternal expulsion into outer darkness. That night, Satan wakes his next subordinate and says:

Sleepst thou Companion dear . . .

Thou to me thy thoughts

Wast wont, I mine to thee was wont to impart . . .

New laws from him who reigns, new minds may raise

In us who serve, new Counsels, to debate

What doubtful may ensue, more in this place

To utter is not safe.

(V. 680)

Clearly, private discussion about the claims of God between these two has gone on before, but "new Counsels, to debate," with a capital letter, also implies a wider and more formal conference. Then Satan orders all his troops to fly during the hours of darkness to his northern palace; presumably all of them except Abdiel became devils, and an angel of, say, the Southern Command did not have the option. But the generals must not feel afterwards that they have had no option, as both Milton and Satan well understand; they must be told privately that this is an order from God, intended to prepare for a reception of the Son, who will make a royal tour "and give laws" (they never discover, we gather, that this was a lie); indeed Satan's "next subordinate" has a good deal more to do during the night:

he together calls

Or several one by one, the Regent Powers, . . .

Tells the suggested cause, and casts between

Ambiguous words, and jealousies, to sound

Or taint integrity; but all obeyed . . .

(700)

That this patter was accepted as a good enough hint again presumes an earlier staff meeting about the claims of God. As to the lie, it may be regarded as an ordinary wartime propaganda operation, designed to anticipate what the enemy is certainly going to do.

The brief electric speech of Satan to all troops (770) has given many critics a large field for calling him ludicrous; but Milton ascribes at least one of its paradoxes to God also; and his rancorous enemies never accused him of ratting here (though his life had been rather aston-

ishly spared) on the large part of its thought which he had very recently been printing himself. The details about the political background of the speech are too long for this article; but at least no contemporary reader could imagine as Mr. Eliot did that Milton was droning out some bromides prepared for him by his secretary. In effect, as the fit reader would readily understand, it represents republicanism as based on a view of God as immanent rather than as lawgiver. Milton holds the political scale sardonically even, but plainly did not mean to make Satan ridiculous here by giving him the well-known opinions of Milton. Besides, the structure of the epic requires Satan not to become ridiculous till he doubts his own thesis upon Niphates top; till then he is meant to be frighteningly plausible.

The speech of Abdiel in reply turns almost entirely on the argument that God had created Satan, though it also calls God a King and says he is known by experience to be good. Abdiel then lets drop, about three-quarters of the way through, that God created the angels through the agency of his Son, "as by his Word," and uses this to introduce the exasperating argument that the Son condescends if he notices Satan enough to order him about. Nobody has mentioned the doctrine in the poem before; God does not say it in his pronouncement giving power to the Son (V. 600). It was the only argument which could have satisfied the mind of Satan, but God preferred to issue a bare challenge; indeed, we could hardly be sure that Milton believed it himself if we had not the *De Doctrina*. Satan in his reply calls it a "strange point and new" (855); and, as the answer of Abdiel merely says that God will punish Satan, the uniqueness of the Son must at least have been an esoteric doctrine in Heaven before (no doubt Abdiel has also heard a good deal of discussion about the new appointment, from the opposing party, during that busy night). In both prose and verse Milton shows a certain amount of puzzlement about the divine Fatherhood, but the idea is at least real enough for the appointment to strike Satan as a gross piece of nepotism. He reacts with splendid intellectual energy, completely undercutting his opponent, by questioning what both sides had previously taken for granted; this is how he arrives at denying his own creation (860)—at least, such is the dramatic way to read the passage, and we are given no hint that the idea had occurred to him before. The line of thought is thus: "Since God is obviously lying about our creation now, in this new doctrine which Abdiel has got hold of, he was probably lying about it all along." That is, while trying to find an answer to an unexpected argument, that the Son deserves to rule

over the angels because he was the instrument for creating them, Satan reflects that none of us angels know by experience how we were created, and then finds himself by mere weight of logic adding that we do not know that the Father created us either. The infinite host echo "as to the sound of waters deep" (870), but we do not hear that any of them worry about this effective retort ever again. Satan however finds it increasingly important for his private self-justification, and his nerve breaks when he rejects it on reaching Paradise.

Such I think is the steel armature without which the statue of Satan could not tower so high and dangerously; I mean, many readers are impressed by his challenging intellectual dignity (and indeed loneliness) without quite realising that this is where the impression comes from. It is not essential for the story, and not in the Bible, and was at least not prominent in recent tradition; so one would like to know where Milton got it from, and what the source was likely to mean to him. The *De Doctrina* is no help here, as its only major gap is the treatment of Satan; presumably he scrapped that part after writing the poem.

Professor Saurat, as has been well said, roused us from our dogmatic slumbers about the sources of Milton (*Milton, Man and Thinker*, 1925; with additions and subtractions, 1944); but his main argument is that the Jewish mystical tradition of the *Zohar* was then broadening the mind of Europe, and this has not much to say about Satan. But it claims to report the views of mystical rabbis of the second century, a main period for the Gnostics, and they did hold views on Satan; to suppose that Milton was conscious of the connection is only to make a further deduction from the evidence of M. Saurat. Thus he remarks (p. 220 of 1944 ed.):

Areopagitica (1644) contains a precious indication: "Who finds not that Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Jerome and others discover more heresies than they well confute, and that oft for heresy which is the truer opinion?" Irenaeus and Epiphanius having written mostly against the Gnostics, Milton thus seems not disinclined to approve the latter.

But this is no great help for M. Saurat's argument that the God of Milton is extremely metaphysical, and thereby wholly justified:

Milton had more sympathy for heretics than for Fathers of the Church, but it is difficult to see what he could derive from the Gnostics. Some, exaggerating the old notion that found some good in the Fall, came to worship the Serpent, the cause of the Fall, as the great benefactor. It was probably as a polemical device, and to confute these Ophites, that Epiphanius declared that the Serpent who had tempted Eve was

no other than Satan. It is only then, about 380 A.D., that tradition of the Fathers at last caught up with Jewish myth. The Jews had reached that conclusion during the first century. (p. 223)

With one part of his mind, I would fully agree, Milton held views about God which make most of the scenes in his Heaven quite impossible; but he did not consider it meaningless or misleading to envisage the traditional story very fully. What is peculiar about this picture of God, as adapted to our feeble imaginations by a poem, is that it is so very like the God of the Gnostics—or like one of their ideas of God, as they did not impose uniformity by persecution. The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, under “Gnosticism,” calls it a slander of the Fathers to say the Gnostics believed the Devil had created the world; instead, “God was limited to the task of blind creation”:

As the agent of Creation, Gnosticism assumes a Demiourgos, who is usually represented as the son of Sophia. He is himself ignorant of the Pleroma above him, and governs the world created by him in the belief that he is the supreme God; but unconsciously he transmits the elements of light which have come to him through his mother. The Demiourgos is conceived not as an evil power, but rather as a cosmical force which acts unwittingly. But, since he represents a mechanical will, controlling the spiritual life of which he has been the unconscious vehicle, he becomes the tyrant from whose thralldom the soul claims deliverance.

Some Gnostics therefore thought it a duty to defy the ordinances of the law, and thereby throw off allegiance to the inferior God; Milton would regard this as merely a confusion about the New Dispensation of Christ. It is clear anyhow that the Gnostics would have been a comfort to Satan upon Niphates top. I happened to come across *The Western Response to Zoroaster* (J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 1958), a very scholarly and rather sceptical survey, contemptuous of the *Encyclopaedia*, which should keep my attempt at a survey from being out of date. There was an element of truth, after all, in saying they believed that Satan created the world, because “The Gnostics and some Hermetists . . . explain creation itself as the result of a fall” (p. 84), just as it is in Milton (VII. 150). Plotinus, though otherwise startlingly unworldly, called this idea coarse and blasphemous; as a result of his influence, Plato was not considered a Dualist after the third century, but in the second century he was. At this period Gnosticism “radiated back” into Iran, says the author, letting himself assume for once that the whole line of thought had come from Persia:

According to a least two texts, when the beings are given their material form this creation is motivated, with Ormuzd, by the need to counter Ahriman's attack. The first initiative to material creation, therefore, comes from the evil spirit. (p. 101)

Thus Milton's historical judgment was right if he decided that the tradition was early, and therefore suitable for his epic. He took a learned interest in such heresies, and would not at all plume himself on being original for inventing one. The translator of the *De Doctrina* remarks, in a footnote to Milton's proof that God created the angels: "The opinion that the angels were not created, but self-existent, according to the Manichæan system, is with great propriety attributed to Satan in *Paradise Lost*." I felt rather snubbed, after adventuring among such peaks of learning, to find that the point was obvious to a theologian in 1825, but perhaps it helps to show that the illiberal attitude to Milton's Satan is a recent one.

My object in giving this sketchy bit of background is to recall that Milton (being so learned a man) would not seriously despise Satan for disbelieving his creation; nor should he, because Satan is not meant to become contemptible till his character collapses after he has doubted his own thesis upon Niphates top. C. S. Lewis, on the other hand, jeers heartily at him for it, saying that he is beginning to incur the Doom of Nonsense, so he imagines he just growed, like Topsy. Lewis is showing contempt here for the beliefs of most of his audience (with something of the noble pride of Satan, perhaps); he treats creation by a personal God as the only theory of origin which is not mere jabberwocky, whereas the audience presumably accept the Darwinian account of the emergence of mankind. I too find that more numinous, more imaginatively stirring, than to say "God just made us; and the earth stands on an elephant, and the elephant stands on a tortoise"; especially as, in the past, the argument has tended to continue "if you ask me what the tortoise stands on I'll burn you alive." Milton shows himself attracted by the idea that Nature somehow works of its own accord, which indeed followed from his basic theory of matter; and he would know that it is distinctly unusual in the history of human opinion to hold that the present ruler of the universe is also its creator. He did not automatically despise the thoughts of pagan philosophers; they could win Heaven by mere faith in God. As for myself, when I was a little boy I was very afraid I might not have the courage which I knew life to demand of me; my life has turned out pretty easy so

far, but if some bully said he would burn me alive unless I pretended to believe he had created me, I hope I would have enough honour to tell him that the evidence did not seem to me decisive. I dare not despise Satan for making this answer.

But the moral argument must not get detached from the critical one, or I may appear to say that the poem is bad because Milton agrees with my opponents. He felt he was doing his duty as an advocate for God; and an advocate is not only allowed but wanted to understand the points where his client's case is weak. The weakest point, as Professor Grierson, for example, soberly remarked, is that, judging by this account, if God had been a better administrator he could have avoided all the miseries of our fallen world. We know that he could have satisfied the mind of Satan earlier, because he does so at last upon Niphates top, at too great cost. A candid reader of the *De Doctrina* will find Milton very conscious of the problems about the justice of God; but he could not have written his Christian epic if he had invented a new God for it. Recent critics, on the other hand, especially in America where they are more energetic about theory than in England, tell us that we must accept the intellectual postulates inherent in the aesthetic form of a literary work, so that it is merely bad taste to find in a poem more than its surface meaning. Hence they often feel that an attempt to do so must be an attack on the poem. Somebody objected to some earlier remarks of mine about *Paradise Lost* that I was blaming a giraffe for not being a rabbit. That is, *The Ecstasie* by Donne was like a rabbit, and to consider what it meant was fair enough; but when I picked on details in the epic which seemed to me evidence of the breadth of Milton's mind he thought I was complaining at some lack of petty correctness, whereas the reader of an epic ought to admire the broad strokes of the brush. This theory would have been hard to explain to Milton. I have tried here to follow his whole account of the tragedy of Satan, and it seems to me a very large-minded one. I think that a critic who cannot follow it, because he thinks Milton wanted us to pick small holes in Satan all the time, has been prevented either by a false theory or by some distressing want in his own nature from realizing the size of the giraffe.

FREDERICK A. OLAFSON

Kafka and the Primacy of the Ethical

CURRENT CRITICAL ESTIMATES of Kafka's achievement fall into two general types. One view is that Kafka is an expositor of the religious life in its starkest, quasi-Kierkegaardian form. The perpetual rebuffs and unresolvable incongruities, in which the search for God eventuates, never react, it is said, upon the theistic assumptions that define the universe within which Kafka's characters move. Even when its two terms are most hopelessly disjoined, the man-God relation remains the keystone of the moral life. On the other view, Kafka's compulsive recurrence to the God-man antithesis begins to make sense only when these theological puzzles are understood as a coded expression of conflicts and neuroses that can be traced in Kafka's personal life. Neither critic denies the presence of religious themes in Kafka's work, although one takes them at face value and the other undercuts them by a psychoanalytic explanation. Both represent Kafka as permanently impaled upon the dilemmas that beset a religious interpretation of the world. One critic regards these dilemmas as in principle inescapable; the other believes that their reality and urgency are borrowed from the psychic conflicts they symbolize. Accordingly, Kafka's persistence in his theistic assumptions will seem heroic to the one and compulsive to the other. But that he does persist; that he is incapable of seeing himself as other than the helplessly inferior term in the God-man relation; and that this incapacity and the lack of moral autonomy it implies carry over into his art and into his conception of his characters—these are assumptions that may fairly be said to be common to critics of both camps.

I wish to challenge this picture of a morally submissive and acquiescent Kafka. I suggest that far from being a helpless victim of the religious predicament, Kafka was in fact an unusually clear-eyed and lucid commentator upon it and that his commentary is of a kind that requires a degree of critical detachment and moral self-ownership with which he is not usually credited. More specifically, I will argue that careful examination of Kafka's greatest work, *The Castle*, inval-

idates at almost every point the critical estimates that place Kafka in the currently fashionable line of descent from Kierkegaard to the theologians of crisis. If affiliations of this sort are needed, I submit that one would do better to associate Kafka with those philosophers and moralists who share an aversion to theodicies and defend the autonomy of morals against those who insist on metaphysical or religious sanctions. I know that to associate Kafka with some of the thinkers who most clearly belong to this tradition is to propound a kind of paradox. In Kafka, there is none of the facile irony or *Fortschrittsfröhlichkeit* that distort the liberal rationalist's treatment of religion. Perhaps any assimilation of a writer like Kafka to a well-defined philosophical tradition blurs his special quality in one way or another. The fact remains that the prevailing emphasis on Kafka's affinities with Kierkegaard and his descendants obscures centrally important features of his work. An interpretation that stresses the very different affinities suggested above can at least sensitize us to much in Kafka that is missed when his intellectual pedigree is antecedently fixed in the manner described.

II

In the relevant sense, a religious view of the world consists in the belief that there exists an all-encompassing purposive order which an all-powerful being, God, progressively realizes; and that this order, however inscrutable, is normative for human beings. When a discrepancy is established between a judgment derived from a human code of morals and the divine program, it is our judgment that must be modified and the human will that must be brought into harmony with the divine will. Within a well-developed religious tradition, a highly selective set of criteria determines what is to be allowed to count as indicative of God's purposes; and frequently a number of moral principles are built into the criteria themselves. Thus, what cannot satisfy an antecedently adopted moral standard cannot count as an expression of God's will. But these rigged definitions still leave us confronted by a great many features of the world which are not allowed by our restrictive criteria to count as expressions of God's will, but which, nevertheless, as their undeniable presence implies, must be at least tolerated by God. Under these circumstances, the pressure to modify the criteria we used in deducing that it would be better if such things did not happen becomes very great. They have happened; and our general assumption of a moral government of the world lends this

occurrence an authority that necessitates a revision of the criteria we used. Since we can have no advance guarantees of what the course of the world will be, no antecedent limits can be set to this process of revision.

If such a “teleological suspension of the ethical,” of which the story of Abraham and Isaac provides the paradigm case, resolves the conflict unambiguously in favor of the divine, other responses to Abraham’s situation are possible. One can, for example, resolve the conflict in such a way that any non-human purposive order becomes irrelevant except in so far as it squares with some human ideal. This anti-Kierkegaardian and anti-revisionist view received its classical formulation from J. S. Mill:

If I am informed that the world is ruled by a being whose attributes are infinite, but what they are we cannot learn, nor what the principles of his government, except that “the highest human morality of which we are capable of conceiving” does not sanction them, I will bear my fate as I may. But when I am told that I must believe this, and at the same time call this being by the names which express and affirm the highest human morality, I say in plain terms that I will not. I will call no being good who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go.

This passage unmistakably places Mill in the tradition with which I have suggested that Kafka be associated, but it is incidentally characterized by a robust self-confidence, if not by a somewhat theatrical bravado. By anticipation, one may wonder whether, without these special accompanying features and the peculiar ethos they suggest, a refusal essentially like Mill’s is not imaginable.

The forthrightness of both these responses to the religious dilemma limits their appeal. For less absolute natures there is a third alternative, although it is not often plainly stated. It is to make the best of both worlds by accepting, on the one hand, the general proposition that the course of the world makes sense, while at the same time operating with a shifting set of criteria for determining what that sense is, with the net result that the sharpest conflicts between the actual course of events and one’s intuitive sense of justice are avoided. Characterized in logical terms, this practice consists in so scrambling one’s evidential procedures that any state of affairs is made compatible with the truth of the higher-order principle that a divine purpose is being realized. As I hope to show, this third alternative amounts to a kind of logical prag-

matism *à outrance* which subordinates everything to the objective of making the higher-order principle come out true under all circumstances and justifies any reassignment of truth-values, however arbitrary, to the premises of an argument endangering that principle, provided the latter is effectively protected. I suggest that the moral world we encounter in *The Castle* is comprehensible only if this uneasy *ménage à trois*—human norms trying to cohabit logically with the actual course of the world and the general covering assumption referred to above—is kept firmly in mind as a term of comparison.

III

The characters in *The Castle* fall into three main groups: K., the stranger who claims that he has been engaged by the Castle as a land-surveyor; the officials of the Castle administration; and the villagers. In most critical treatments of the novel, primary emphasis is placed rightly upon the relation of K. to the Castle. K.'s relation to the Castle is the central issue. It does not follow, however, that the village and its inhabitants are simply a kind of back-drop against which the fundamental conflict between K. and the Castle is played out. The truth is that K.'s relation to the Castle can be understood only if it is contrasted with another, and very different, relationship to the Castle: that of the villagers. More importantly, one can understand Kafka's attitude toward K. and therefore *his* relation to the Castle only if the relative moral weights he assigns to the one and the other relationships are established. What I am suggesting is that the operative moral contrast in the novel is the one between K. and the villagers; that the contrast is unambiguously in K.'s favor; and that these two facts compel a revision of the standard interpretations of Kafka's moral and religious intentions in this novel.

When critics have paid any attention at all to the role of the villagers in the novel, they have tended to idealize them and their way of life. They have what K. does not have and is trying, unsuccessfully, to get. K. is the homeless, alienated, urban man of the modern age and the village symbolizes the organic, pre-individualistic community of an earlier day. K. does in fact want to acquire an accepted status in the community and in pursuit of this goal he is willing to put up with a long series of humiliations; and to that extent, it is true that the villagers' mode of life functions as a kind of ideal in the novel. But if one tries to explain just why it is that K. cannot be accepted by the villagers, things begin to look very different. It turns out that he is unassimilable

because he stubbornly persists in certain ways of viewing his own situation, which simply do not lend themselves to the kind of simplistic contrast with the mores of the village that is implicit in an idealizing interpretation.

It is particularly interesting that these differences of attitude are presented, not just as functions of differing local circumstances, but as springing from opposed modes of thought—*Denkweisen*—and by implication, from profoundly different conceptions of the moral life. Early in the novel, in the course of several conversations between K. and various villagers, they emerge in a very explicit way. Indeed, the villagers themselves are aware that they are differences of *Denkweise* and repeatedly say as much. On one occasion, the landlady says to K., after trying to explain to him the ways of the Castle: “If I try very hard, I can, of course, think myself into your ideas, valid, perhaps, in the very different land from which you come.” But K.’s notions are “madness, absolute madness; one begins to feel confused when one plays with such mad ideas.” K.’s “ignorance of the actual situation is so appalling that it makes my head go round to listen to you and compare your ideas and opinions with the real state of things.”

Specifically, the situation that is interpreted in such diverse ways by K. and by the villagers is the one produced by K.’s presence in the village and his demand that his appointment as land-surveyor be confirmed by the Castle. In K.’s view, this is a straightforward moral situation. The Castle has entered into a quasi-contractual agreement with him, and now that he has, at considerable inconvenience to himself, arrived in the village, the Castle must carry out its part of the bargain. When it seems that his status may not be recognized, K. unhesitatingly makes an approach to the Castle to insist, as he says, “on his rights.” It is of central importance that K. never wavers in his characterization of his own case as a *prima facie* violation of a moral rule—the rule that obliges us to keep our promises. Working, as he does, within a definite system of moral rules, K. assumes that the authority that has the power to set right the wrong that has been done him operates within the same body of rules and need only have the circumstances of the case brought to its attention to correct its error. If it refuses, it will be unmistakably in the wrong. With the exception of one or two passages which I will take up later, everything in the novel indicates that K. recognizes the Castle as the legitimate authority in the village; and any challenge to it that he may represent is one of which he can hardly be said to be aware. But the authority K. recog-

nizes is one that is subject to moral rules and its acts cannot be justified automatically by virtue of the fact that they are acts of the Castle. K. is never tempted to manipulate his argument so as to save the general principle that what the Castle does is right by rejecting the factual premise that in this case it has done wrong. In the last instance, he is prepared to sacrifice the postulate of the infallibility of the Castle and stand by his own moral evaluation of his case.

K.'s conversation with the Mayor makes it plain that the latter would resolve the conflict in a very different way. The Mayor tells K. that "not only is nothing done here without taking thought," but also that "the very possibility of error must be ruled out of account." Later he admits that "once in a while an error does occur as in your case," but he covers himself by asking, "Who can finally say that it is an error?" The implication is that no one can and that in the village no one does. This amounts to saying that when the application of a moral rule to a particular case produces a conclusion that is inconsistent with the principle that what the Castle does is right, it is this conclusion that must be surrendered. The Mayor's way of putting this makes it clear that he, too, has reached the conclusion that there has been an "error" in K.'s case, but the automatic way in which this conclusion is then suppressed illustrates the hermetic, self-sealing character of the moral world which he and the other villagers inhabit. If this procedure seems cynical, it is not a conscious cynicism. To the Mayor, the logical barriers insulating the assumption that the Castle is always right against unfavorable evidence are not artificially contrived. They are as antecedent to reasoning and immune to correction as the assumption they protect. But while the Mayor retires behind these remarkable defenses, K. perseveres in his publicly announced belief that "a terrible abuse of my case, and probably of the law, is being carried on," and threatens that he "will know how to protect (himself) against it."

It is now clear in what sense K. represents a danger to the villagers. Because he persists in viewing his case as a miscarriage of justice, he revives in the villagers the tensions that are produced by a felt inconsistency between their general assumption that the Castle is always right and the perhaps never quite suppressed deliverance of their own moral consciousness. K.'s attitude amounts to a kind of moral aggression against the villagers and he is, by his very presence and his unconscionably simple-minded demands, challenging the moral structure of village life. What is it the villagers are afraid of? They are afraid of moral freedom. If K. can be called in one sense an alienated man,

the villagers are alienated in another and profounder sense. In revising their own moral judgments so that they will square with the actions of the Castle (which can never be reduced to a rule), they have alienated their own moral autonomy. They have projected their own moral center of gravity into a remote and incomprehensible agency which is really just a grandiose, externalized image of their own moral *Unmündigkeit*. And having created the Castle, they must protect it against aggressors like K., because in protecting it they are protecting themselves. As K. shrewdly asks, when he is warned by the landlady of what may happen to him if he persists in trying to see Klammm, a high official of the Castle: "What are you afraid of? Surely you are not afraid for Klammm?"

K.'s moral impact is felt, not merely by the village as a whole, but also by specific individuals, and most deeply by Frieda, who becomes K.'s fiancée. Theological critics have seen in the story of K.'s relationship with Frieda a critique of the romantic conception of love as a mediating link with the divine. Some critics have even regarded this relationship as constituting K.'s "sin." This view is evidently attractive because it seems to provide a justification for the Castle's treatment of K., but it is implausible on two grounds. It is by no means clear that K.'s intentions in this affair are bad. There is a good deal of evidence in the novel that K. and Frieda genuinely love one another; and even if K.'s original motive is to establish contact with the Castle through Frieda, his interest in her should come to an abrupt end when she loses her job in the inn. In fact, his tenderness and affection for her seem to increase. And even if one were to agree that K.'s motives are bad and that he deserves punishment, the "punishment" meted out would still be outrageously disproportionate to the "sin."

The story of K. and Frieda is susceptible of a quite different interpretation. It can be read as a study of the disintegrating effect, upon a person like Frieda, of contact with a person morally organized in the way K. is; and also, perhaps, as a parable of the inability of the morally unfree to love another human being.

To the villagers, Frieda is an enterprising and aggressive young woman, but Kafka repeatedly emphasizes her extreme and even pathetic moral dependence. Her sense of self and her feeling of superiority are based entirely upon the status that her job at the inn gives her and her contact with Klammm, an official of the Castle. But loving K. means sharing his lonely and exposed position in a hostile community; and Frieda is not strong enough to resist these new pressures. She cannot

bear separation from Klammm and the loss of her place in the scheme of things that culminates in the Castle. It is remarkable that K., in the midst of his own difficulties, is able to understand the character of this unhappiness and even sympathize with it. As he says to Frieda: "You were torn away from Klammm; I can't calculate how much that meant, but a vague idea of it I've managed to form gradually." At the same time, he urges her "to put the past and its illusions behind you; and to love and trust me as I love you." Frieda responds to his appeals, but in the end the pull of the village is too strong for her. Her last words to K. are: "Why do you always persecute me?" And she adds, "Only think, Jeremiah, he has disproved everything. But even if everything were disproved, what would be gained by that, what would it matter to me?" There could scarcely be a more radical formula of self-disqualification as an independent moral consciousness.

It is significant that in rejecting K., Frieda should turn to one of the "helpers." Their role in the novel is to represent an extreme form of the unconcerned and irresponsible "naturalness" with which K.'s attitude is in such marked contrast. As K. describes them to Frieda, they are "in appearance, good, childish, irresponsible youths, fallen from the sky, from the Castle, a dash of childhood memories with them, too." K. quite explicitly states that "I was the antithesis of it all." In this connection, it is important to note that K. is severe and even cruel in his treatment of the helpers and that Frieda is, by contrast, markedly sympathetic. It is, in fact, hard to deny them a certain amount of sympathy. They are playful and good-humored and cheerfully put up with a great deal of bad treatment. At the same time, there is something pathetic and animal-like about them; and it is impossible to see anything remotely like an idealization of the "natural" in Kafka's description of their antics. They were sent by the Castle "to cheer (K.) up a little" because he "takes things too seriously." They have failed and their encounter with K. has embittered them. But while one may pity them, one cannot regard them as full-fledged persons and certainly not as representing any kind of moral alternative to K. But if the contrast between K. and the villagers is such as I have suggested, then not only does any interpretation that idealizes the villagers fall to the ground, but so does any reading that overlooks the contrast and imputes to K. the attitudes and the role that are in fact those of the villagers.

K.'s harshness toward the helpers may be explained if one remembers that, if he is a danger to the village, the village, in a different way,

is a danger, or rather, a temptation to him. There is a remarkable scene in which K. is waiting for Klamm to appear. Klamm's driver offers him a drink of brandy. K. is tempted to relax his watchfulness and to let himself enjoy the obliviousness produced by the brandy which is "so sweet, so caressing, like words of praise from someone one likes very much, yet does not know clearly what they are for and has no desire to know and is simply happy to know it is one's friends who are saying them." What this passage conveys is a sense of the insidious attraction that the villagers' mode of life has for K., and it is this very attraction that obliges him to react harshly to the innocent prankishness of the helpers. To acquiesce in the general mood of uncritical acceptance would be moral suicide for K.; and when he is told that he will miss Klamm whether he waits or not, he replies that he will wait just the same. "It seemed to K. that . . . he had won a freedom such as hardly anybody had ever succeeded in winning, and as if nobody could dare to touch him or drive him away—or even to speak to him; but this conviction was equally strong—as if at the same time there were nothing more senseless, nothing more hopeless than this freedom, this waiting, this inviolability."

IV

Although relatively little critical attention has been paid to the place of the Barnabas family in the novel, K.'s relationship with this family and the story of the family itself are recounted in great detail by Kafka. The reason for this emphasis is to be found in the peculiarly isolated position of the family in the village. By allying himself with the Barnabas family against the village, K. in effect espouses their cause and, in so doing, further defines the difference between himself and the villagers upon which I have been insisting. As Kafka presents it, this episode is so morally unambiguous that it serves as an ideal touchstone for evaluating the sharply different reactions to its central events which he assigns to K. and to the villagers.

The "fate" of the Barnabas family is decided when the older sister, Amalia, angrily rejects a dishonorable proposal made to her by Sortini, a high official of the Castle. Her action, amounting as it does to an independent moral initiative on her part, brings down a punishment on the whole family, but this punishment is not inflicted by the Castle. It is the villagers who, without any apparent prompting, immediately ostracize the Barnabas family. The profound irony of the situation is that if the members of the family did not feel and act guilty, they

would not be avoided by the villagers. In the eyes of the latter, any unresolved moral conflict with the Castle is an intolerable solecism and one gathers that they would be satisfied if the Barnabas family would simply act as though amends had been made to the Castle so that the community would be spared the painful spectacle of what looks dangerously like moral autonomy. But, with the possible exception of Amalia, they *do* feel guilty. Of Amalia, who despises "Castle gossip" and does not "know fear, for herself or others," we are told that she can "stand face to face with the truth and go on living." But she is so totally withdrawn that any general challenge to the Castle that may be implicit in her attitude remains undeveloped.

When K. hears the story of the Barnabas family, his reaction is direct and unequivocal. He does not hesitate to qualify Sortini's conduct as "criminal" and the treatment of the family by the villagers as unjust and monstrous. It is not Amalia but "Sortini who horrifies (K.)—the possibility of such abuse of power." He is deeply shocked when Amalia's sister, Olga, seems to suggest that Amalia would have done better to go to Sortini, and he tells Olga that the villagers' reverence for the Castle is "a mistaken reverence,—a reverence that dishonors its object." When Olga tells him that he is the only one in the village who thinks this way, K. replies: "Since nothing has happened, what is there to be afraid of?" In a deleted passage he tells Olga that "it is as though all your endeavors were aimed at establishing the victory of the Castle beyond any doubt." And in another, he explicitly identifies his situation with that of the Barnabas family when he says: "If they are playing a game with you, then they are playing a game with me quite as much, and it is a single, astonishingly unitary game." It should be noted, however, that if Amalia and, by implication, K. fail this test, there are those in the novel who do not. If there is one thing for which the villagers are ready at virtually any hour of the day or night, it is a teleological suspension of the ethical. It follows that the vital question must be whether Kafka gives any clues as to how he evaluates these two utterly different reactions to Sortini's proposal. I submit that there is not a single passage in which any qualification of K.'s initial reaction to the Sortini incident is proposed or in which his original characterization of Sortini's conduct is undercut by a Kierkegaardian line of reasoning. The primary values of the story, as first told, are allowed to stand and the implicit criticism is directed, not at Amalia or K., but at the moral passivity and fearfulness of the villagers.

In the course of the Barnabas episode and elsewhere, it becomes

apparent that, in spite of K.'s precarious situation, he is looked to by a number of villagers as a source of hope. K.'s interest in the Barnabas family is aroused by the hope that they may help him to establish contact with the Castle; but it turns out that it is they who are looking to him for help. Olga, in fact, tells him that her family's "fate has become in a certain measure dependent upon you." K.'s is in a sense a test case; and his unequivocal insistence on his rights attracts, at the same time as it rather frightens, her. Nor is she the only one to feel this attraction. In his search for intermediaries, K.'s interest is aroused by a woman who is described to him as "a girl from the Castle." She is ill; it is the "climate here that she cannot stand." One may guess that it is the moral climate of the village that she finds intolerable. But she, too, is deeply interested in K. who is significantly described as having "some medical knowledge . . . experience in dealing with sick people." Here, as in the case of the Barnabas family, the roles are reversed; and Hans, her son, who is in the habit of asking insistent questions "to enable him to come to an independent decision about what to do," turns out to be a great admirer of K. He believes that "though for the moment K. was wretched and looked down on, yet in some unimaginable and distant future he would excel everyone." He himself "wants to be a man like K."

Surely it is indicative of Kafka's intentions that these people who are at odds with the village and look hopefully to K. are among the few genuinely sympathetic characters in the novel. To conclude that it is K. and the tiny minority who "side" with him that must learn to emulate the moral docility of the villagers would be a perverse misreading of these intentions. It is well known that Kafka read and was deeply impressed by Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. But if the story of Abraham was in his mind when he wrote *The Castle*, that story had undergone a remarkable transformation. It is as though Abraham had become convinced that God cannot actually wish him to sacrifice Isaac, and had set out to have an administrative error corrected by the heavenly bureaucracy. But such an Abraham would represent the primacy of the ethical and would be the exact reverse of Kierkegaard's Abraham. If a parallel is drawn to *The Castle* at all, it must be drawn in such a way as to subvert the very thesis it is intended to support.

V

There are two episodes in the novel which seem to resist the general interpretation I am proposing. They are K.'s prematurely combative

behavior upon arrival in the village, which suggests that he may be an imposter, and the interview with Bürgel, a liaison secretary of the Castle, in which hope is held out that K.'s petition may be granted.

It is noteworthy that after the first chapter or so, K.'s conduct seems entirely consistent with what one would expect of a man who had come to the village in the honest conviction that he had been appointed land-surveyor there. Why, then, does he strike such a challenging note at the beginning? I have already pointed out that K. does not seem to be fully aware of the nature of the challenge that he represents to the moral structure of the village. Certainly, he has not deliberately come to the village to make that challenge. But if K. does not see all the implications of the stand he is taking, Kafka must. I would argue that the early passages in which K.'s aggressive and suspicious manner seems out of proportion with anything the Castle has done, illustrate a way of presenting K. as himself in possession of an author's-eye view of his role and that this is a mode of presentation that Kafka abandoned and might have been expected to suppress entirely in a final draft of the novel. As evidence, I would point to an alternate version of the opening scene which Kafka *did* delete. Here the challenging attitude I have alluded to appears in greatly intensified form. K. is a man with a mission and it is a mission which has nothing discernible to do with land-surveying. "I am here to fight," he says. "I have a difficult task ahead of me and I have dedicated my whole life to it. I ruthlessly suppress everything that might disturb me in carrying it out." These are the sentiments of a man who is motivated by an abstractly conceived cause of some sort and is deliberately attacking the Castle, and not those of a man who has been unjustly treated and is demanding redress. Kafka must have perceived that a presentation of K. in this latter role would be much more effective than in the former, and one can only agree that it is. One might also suggest, in explanation of these apparent inconsistencies, that, even in this role, K.'s naiveté is never quite complete and that he has flashes of insight into the true nature of the incompatibility of his moral style with that of the village. He seeks an identity in life that can be established only if it is certified by a supreme validating agency, the Castle. But perhaps it is borne in upon him, from time to time, that in this sense, no one has an identity and that in this sense he is not and cannot be a land-surveyor or, indeed, anything at all.

The substance of Bürgel's remarks to K. is that if an official of the Castle is surprised by a petitioner, at night, he is sometimes "involuntarily inclined to judge matters from a more private point of view."

A "peculiar and absolutely improper exchange of roles" takes place and errors are committed which are difficult if not impossible to correct. It sounds very much as though Bürgel is describing his own circumstances, inviting K. to make his request, and assuring him that it will be granted. But K. is asleep and does not hear.

Now if Bürgel means what he says and is capable of making good his implied promise, then it certainly seems that a kind of hope has been held out to K. But to whose credit should this redound? Surely not to that of the Castle. By its standards, such actions are mistakes and they occur only when officials improperly judge a case from a "private point of view," i.e., by non-official, "human" standards. In any case, Kafka, on several occasions, emphasizes the relative insignificance of Bürgel's position in the Castle hierarchy and one wonders whether the hope he holds out is not to be classed with the letter and the telephone call from the Castle which seem to assure recognition by the Castle and then turn out to mean little or nothing. Even if Bürgel *is* in a position to hold out the prospect of a reconciliation with the Castle, it is significant that there is no suggestion that K. must first admit some sort of guilt or do penance. In fact, Bürgel's offer is so devoid of conditions that one is tempted to attribute it, as he himself does, to a kind of helplessness on his part that has very little to do with the merits of the case. In any event, the potential recipient of this bemused act of grace is asleep and does not know that an offer is being made, so the danger of a real breach in the Castle system is not very great. Bürgel virtually says as much when he remarks that K.'s sleepiness is "an excellent arrangement" whereby "the world corrects itself in its course and maintains a balance," i.e., cancels out "errors" produced by the helpless benevolence of minor officials and preserves the integrity of the Castle's system. But if so, Bürgel seems rather a part of the system itself, not an alternative to it. In the end, had the novel been completed, K. was to die, exhausted by his efforts which had not produced any result except an edict of the Castle to the effect that although K. had no right to live and work in the village, his presence there would be tolerated. But early in the novel K. explicitly declared that he "did not want an act of grace by the Castle but his rights" and this is what no one in the Castle—not even Bürgel—is prepared to give him.

VI

Could a mind that was permanently immured in the paradoxes of religious faith and incapable of envisaging human action except through

the categories and assumptions of such a faith, have had the power to create an imaginative contrast such as that between K. and the villagers? And if it is true that no one could have rendered the moral atmosphere of the village who had not known, in his own life, the meaning of what Kant, in another connection, called the heteronomy of the will, is it not equally true that the conception of such a character as K. presupposes the achievement of a sense of moral identity that lifts the self out of the impasse in which all attempts at theodicy end? If the answer in both cases is affirmative, as I think it must be, then *The Castle* is not a testament of neurosis, but of a painfully won freedom or perhaps of a freedom that is not so much won as accepted. If Kafka begins by believing, with the theologians of crisis, that God is inscrutable, he ends by pushing the man-God contrast to the point where the opacity of the divine intention cancels out its moral relevance. The result is that if one says that God is inscrutable, one must really mean just that and not subtly manipulate this *non possumus* in the interest of some special conception of God's program. Indeed, a consistently agnostic theism and a flat atheism have very much the same effect: to cut off religious discourse and to compel us to make do with such knowledge and with such moral insights as may be otherwise available. If Kafka can be said to be a theist at all then his is a self-diremptive theism. The unique value of his writings derives from the fact that we can almost see their author crossing the invisible line that distinguishes an utterance of the type, "God is inscrutable," that still retains genuine religious significance, from a use of the same formula that makes it no more than a dramatic image for the moral obscurity of the world—not so very different from Nietzsche's "God is dead." Unlike Nietzsche, Kafka never produced a rhetoric of self-assertive moral freedom, and he completely avoids the traditional flourishes of programmatic atheism. On the other hand, it is his great distinction that, having passed this point of no return, he never tried, as so many contemporary Protestant theologians have, to make failure edifying or inscrutability informative. Kafka's spiritual posture is so rare and so hard to define just because he does scrupulously avoid both these kinds of pathos—the pathos of Promethean moral heroism and the pathos of faith "quia absurdum." But what he does do, and what he could hardly have done if his main concern had been Nietzsche's or Kierkegaard's, is to realize, with an authenticity and simple truth that seem to me unique, that crucial moment in the religious life in which the moral consciousness "prises itself off the world" and recognizes itself for the first time in all its vulnerability and precariousness.

RONALD PERRY

Translations from the Lao

These poems and fables were collected, haphazardly, during a recent period of a year and a half spent in Laos. They are not intended in any sense to be either representative or authoritative. In selecting material for translation, I have made no attempt to follow any pattern or particular logic, but have dealt only with works which, for one reason or another, immediately appealed to me.

The whole problem of translating from the Lao has been a particularly difficult one for me, as (unlike, for example, so much of Chinese and Japanese verse) the lyric, the song, in which I have been most interested, has not generally been considered a sufficiently serious medium for the Lao poet, and therefore has not been extensively set down in a written form. Like most of the Lao fables and popular tales, the song has been passed on from one generation to the next in an oral tradition, and it has only been within the last few years that any serious attempt has been made at collection. In contrast, the great bulk of material through which I have until now probed or waded is largely either didactic and of a strong theological cast, or in the form of topical-mythical-historical narrative, usually reminiscent of the Indian tales and sagas, and I did not find this interesting or moving enough to lend itself easily to translation.

Most of the material included here is traditional, of unknown authors and various historical periods, and much of it appears, in variation, in the literature of other areas in South-East Asia. The only contemporary work included here is the "Night-Song: Thamnaret," which I heard sung at a Lao religious festival in Vientiane, to the accompaniment of bamboo flutes, pipes, xylophones and stringed instruments. The singer, a young Lao named Thamnaret, told me that this song was his own construction, although for its techniques he had had recourse to certain formal patterns of nocturne and lament in traditional Lao poetry. The version of "Two Invocations" printed here I first heard chanted by Buddhist monks in a neighboring Wat, but of this also certain other versions can be found in the Thai and Burmese. I have taken some liberties with the "Invocation: Namathu," arranging it, rather arbitrarily, I'm afraid, to suit my own ear. In its original

version, it appears as a section in what is perhaps the most important of all Lao narrative-dramatic poems, the Sin Xai.

Insofar as I know, none of these has been heretofore translated into English, although slightly different versions of the three fables, the "Invocation: Namathu," and the songs of Sétaphon and Mahaxay were translated into French for an issue of France-Asie (Tome XII, mars-avril-mai, 1956) devoted to Laos.

INVOCATION: NAMATHU

First Priest: This day will we make ceremony
Unto him crowned with the Triple Crown
Unto him whose music is
Knowledge of the Three Worlds

Second Priest: This day will we place ourselves
In the place of first light
Which is the beginning of music

Third Priest: This day will we join our fingers
Towards him (who is music)
Towards the sudden shaft of light
That falls between the East and the West
Falling between our silences

A man steps forward. There is a tolling of bells. He speaks:

Now, in this First World
There are premonitions of thunder
Rain falls in the wilderness
The wind and the storm rage together
In all the violent places of the heart
Until fruit trees by the thousands
Turn greener in this green world

Now, in this Second World
(We can know no other)—only
Drifts of light down through clouds

Milk opal and the color of chalk
The color of mourning like a brass bell

Now, in this Third World
The sun swimming in leaves
Declining into evening and the dark
Roots tug at our shadows

First Priest: This day will we make ceremony
After the wind and the storm
Will we seek him
And know him in his eloquence

Second Priest: This day will we be placed
In the place of first and only light
Which is his heart's place

Third Priest: This day will we be known
Unto him crowned with the Triple Crown
Although we cannot know him
Will we be known unto him
For we have known the Three Worlds
And know now that we know nothing

NIGHTSONG: THAMNARET

These are my countries, my forests
And fields full of fires
In the peacock's gold eye
A world and an occasion—love
In my crazy house on stilts
And my latitude of gold inhabited
By a race of dancers
Whose slightest posturing
Is itself both end and beginning
As, from the end of innocence
They contrive an eloquence
Ambiguous as leaves

Wind rising, in the fire-
Trees the firefly's sermon:
This night, the End of Desire
Your love will be like a stone

Your love will be like a stone
In your mouth, you will be
Blind, you will not see the sun
Nor know the moon's urgency
Trembling on the verge of
Light; but dark will be your own
Heart's house, timbered with shadows
Whose walls lengthen and sway
Like dancers, open and close
Like those enormous, dreaming trees
That celebrate their death
In constant seasons of leaves
Until, in an excess of
Love at last you will be undone
In your house (like your heart)
At the heart of a stone

This is my world and weather
Countries of my ruined house
Locked in their fastnesses
Their colors fading on my sleeve
All this landscape gone to seed:
Cities of stone, cities
Of sandalwood returned
Each year to their own dust
Under the immemorial, fading fall
Of constant suns, of constant snows
That drink the wildest weather up
Under the drinking trees

Alas! I am not what I was
Am more foreign now for being loved
But O, if I could only wear
The singing countries of my heart
Once more upon my sleeve

THE SONG OF SÉTAPHON

Came then into the forest
And up into horizon
Over the edge of the world
And into the heart's country
One long month's journey
Crossed mountains and deep into forests
Into that improbable weather
On deep road in enormous green
Where were no villages
Among those silences
But heart's country was populous
The mountains were people
Wore hats contrived of vines
In caves the wind had a hundred voices
One long year's journey
Swam up into cities of cloud
Our language was the language of birds
Whistling with wings

The journey was inside us
The sun overcame us with herons
With jackfruits, mangoes and citrons
Until we moved on
And deep as down is
The road unwound like silk before us
Entangled in spiders' webs
Lost in perfumes at every little wind
Came then into that secret place
We did not know of
Where a hundred birds sang
On every branch on every leaf
Fire-trees, peacocks and herons
Everywhere there were flowers
The journey was forgotten
The sun overcame us with pungencies
A wasp was heard, his gold wings
Whirring in search of the pollen

TWO INVOCATIONS

1

Om,

Like a white tree

In you I will find my talisman

Om, Sathatheti!

You are like a ghost in my house

Om,

I will know the intricacy of your silence

I will be acquainted with your grief

I will reside forever in your nations

Om, Maha saming!

In you I will become my enemies

2

Divinities

Who are the populace of trees

Who inhabit the smoke on the mountains

Who live in deep caves

Who swim beautifully in our rivers

Indra, Yama

Lokapala, the four spirits of the world

Angels and archangels

In our fastnesses we pray

That we may bear witness

Always in our own language

SONG OF MAHAXAY

O banyan with beautiful leaves

A bird will make his house

In your shadow

What do you say?

Perhaps it will be a starling

The color of a mackerel

Will you make room for him
In the windy world of your branches?
Or are you afraid
That he will eat your fruit?

He will be eating his own heart
And will not disturb
Your vegetable silence

If you touch him with your fingers
You will be touching yourself

Like yours, my heart
Is most difficult of access
And desperately repels me

THE ORIGIN OF MONKEYS

Once upon another time, in a deep, green, beautiful country called Moungh Phoueun, or the Country of Trees, in the village of Nakham, there lived a widow who had twelve children, one for each year of her marriage.

For three years there had been no rain in Moungh Phoueun, and so the dazzling, beautiful green of mountains and fields and woods began to fade. Almost imperceptibly, the rivers foundered and sank in dry sand, and even the trees withdrew from the world, into themselves, and a famine raged all across the country. The misery was extreme in the villages perched high on stilts, desperation was like a weather in the blood, and only the aristocrats and the rich men could find a little rice to eat. The poor farmers could not sustain themselves for long on the few withered fruits and dried tubers they could find on the edge of the forest, and so every day they died in great number.

In the midst of this general desolation, the lot of the widow who had twelve children was frightful. She was obliged to work without ceasing day and night in order to feed herself and her children. Each morning, before light, she would go as far as she dared into the forest to pick some scattered, burning fruits and to look in the iron ground for roots and tubers, and she would not return to her house until dark. Each

evening she would sit up late to work the cloth the rich men entrusted to her, weaving and stitching her fingers into bone in exchange for a little rice.

In this way she existed, among the foundering syllables of her children, who demanded, like birds, to be fed almost continuously, and for whom there was nothing, and who could not or would not help her, because the oldest was only twelve.

One day, a rich man, at whose house the widow had worked all that day, gave her three handfuls of rice. Overjoyed, she wrapped the rice in a paper basket, promising it to herself, who had had less than nothing, as solace for a lonely hour. But when she came home, her children opened their mouths like birds, and trembled with longing at the sight of the paper basket, coveting it for themselves, who had had nothing. As soon as the widow turned her back, they threw themselves like birds on the basket, and in the wink of an eye had devoured it as completely as though it were their own hearts.

When the widow saw that the rice was gone, she was beside herself. Caught up in her rage, she made up her mind then and there to abandon her children in the darkest heart of the forest, and that very instant, before she could stop herself, she put her idea into execution.

The older children, carrying the younger ones on their shoulders, wandered in the deep world of the trees, crying. Each day they fed themselves blindly on fruits, and each night they huddled together, like the trees around them, and trembled with the cold.

Then, very strangely, they began to accustom themselves to that existence in the forest, and discovered that they could live very well on the bitter fruits, and sleep very well on the iron ground. Slowly, their limbs began to change, until they were as supple and lithe as vines, and their eyes began to grow into the narrow shapes of leaves. In the end, mottled brown and green, they clambered easily in the trees, and they ran as quickly as the quickest inhabitants of the forest. In order to crunch the bitter skins of the fruits and crack the nuts that were like stones, their teeth became very long and sharp, and finally, when their bodies sprouted in a long, thick pelt, and their hair hung down like silk past their shoulders, they were no longer even remotely human.

Two years later, when the drought came to an end with marvelous rains in the country of Moung Phoueun, and the rice began again to push up its pungent green in the paddies, and the people were able, as before, each to have his basket of rice, the widow remembered her children, and went to look for them in the forest. After many days of

wandering alone in the enormous, dreaming world of the trees, pushing past the thickets and tangles of vines and stumbling over the rotted logs and mushrooms, she found them, and so found her punishment.

All twelve of them, wrapped in their silken fur, swung from branch to branch above her, grimacing terribly and chattering loudly at the spectacle of human grief.

The widow called to them: "Come to me, my dearest children, come and eat the rice we have now in abundance!"

But the children's only answer was a swaying of the leaves and a green, unintelligible music.

At last, the oldest among them, for whom that other world was still a dim memory, swung close in the tree above her and put his face, like a dazzling mask, between two branches, and looked sorrowfully down at her, trying to speak, and then they all ran and hid themselves in the shaking branches.

Despairing, the widow returned to her house, where she died a few months later of sadness and a great remorse.

THE ANIMALS' CHILDREN

There was once, in a northern province, a certain childless widow who worked hard in a rice paddy on the edge of a forest. One day, in the middle of the dry season, the widow was possessed of a sudden and unaccountable thirst, and went off from her work in search of water. Almost at once, just inside the forest, she found a pool of clear water standing in the enormous footprint of an Elephant. Overjoyed, the widow dropped to her knees, and, peering into the eyes of her own reflected image, drank from the pool.

Some months later, to her consternation but secret delight, the widow discovered that she was going to have a child. Although all her neighbors were puzzled at this, knowing that the widow lived alone, and had no lovers, they consented in their curiosity to help her, and so, after the appointed time, a baby girl was born to the widow in her small house on stilts at the edge of the forest. The child was quite ordinary looking in every way, except that she was very beautiful, and had great quantities of dark, silken hair, from which a delicate scent rose continuously into the dry air. Because of this, the widow called the child *Girl-with-the-Perfumed-Hair*.

A year later, on an extremely hot day in the rice paddy, the widow again became very thirsty, and went off into the forest to look for water. As before, she found a pool of clear water almost immediately, this time standing in the shallow imprint of a Tiger's padding step. Looking deep into her own eyes reflected in the pool, the widow drank deeply, and very soon thereafter was again expecting a child.

This was too much for the widow's neighbors and friends. Although she carefully explained her adventures to everyone who wondered and exclaimed at these strange pregnancies, no one believed her. They laughed at her, and pointed their crooked fingers in her direction when she walked in the village. So, when the time came for the widow's second child to be born, there was no one who would help her. All alone in her house on stilts, still bent over in the agony of her deliverance, the widow looked down at her new, small son, who was, like his sister, unusually beautiful, and whose eyes were long and pointed and bright, like those of a leaf or a cat. Because of this, the widow called him Boy-whose-Eyes-are-like-Leaves.

When the little girl and boy reached the age of understanding, they were astonished, and deeply hurt, by the cries and catcalls of the other village children, who called them "Elephant's Daughter," and "Tiger's Brat." Laughed at, scorned and driven off, the two children withdrew from the life of the village, and made their own small and intricate world, playing always by themselves under the trees just inside the forest.

One day, when the widow was lying on her bed in the small house on stilts, very weak and near death, the two children questioned her, begging her to tell them before it was too late who they were, and why the other children rejected them with taunts and insults. The poor woman wept, and, because she felt herself very close to death, recounted to her son and daughter the story of their origin.

As soon as the funeral was over, Girl-with-the-Perfumed-Hair and Boy-whose-Eyes-are-like-Leaves set off from the village and entered the forest in search of their fathers. In the forest the two children encountered many wild beasts, but none would consent to do any harm to this beautiful child whose hair smelled so good, nor to her younger brother whom she protected. To each animal she met, the girl bowed gravely, and inquired the way to the place where the King of the Elephants had his residence.

One day, the two children came face to face with an enormous Tiger, bigger and more beautiful, with his silken stripes and

long, glowing eyes, than any they had seen before. The Tiger stood stock-still in the middle of the path, and did not even blink his eyes, but looked straight at the boy, who shivered and hid behind his sister's skirt. Although the girl was frightened at this, she bowed graciously, as always, and asked the Tiger where she could find the King of the Elephants, who was their father.

After a moment, the Tiger turned his great head, and, looking directly at her, said, "You may well be the Elephant's daughter. I do not know. But *he* is not. Do you think I cannot recognize my own son?" And, with this, the Tiger came towards them, very slowly, padding on the path with long, beautiful, lithe steps, his great eyes glowing strangely. Although the girl recognized as truth what the Tiger had said, she was now very frightened, and, holding fast to her brother's hand, stepped back, crying: "No! He is my brother, and the King of the Elephants' rightful son. You are mistaken. Ask him yourself if you do not believe me."

Hearing this, the Tiger stopped in the middle of the path, and looked again at the boy, who was hiding in terror behind his sister's skirt. "Well, tell me then," the Tiger said, very gently. "Are you not indeed my true son?"

"O, please, no!" cried the boy, shaking violently. "O, no! My father is the King of the Elephants, and if you harm us, he will surely come to find and destroy you!"

The Tiger looked at him very sadly, and then he shook his head softly, from side to side. "Very well, then," he said. "But someday you will come to look for me, and perhaps I will not be there." Then the Tiger turned abruptly and vanished into the rustling vines.

Very soon after this, the children came to the place, deep in the green world of the trees, where the King of the Elephants lived with all his servants and subjects. Standing very small and straight before the huge beast, the girl told him her story, indicating that her brother's origin had been the same.

The Elephant trumpeted a long, tree-rattling roar, and said: "If you are indeed my children, you will find no difficulty in proving it, since you will know how to walk on my back."

Very eager to prove himself, Boy-whose-Eyes-are-like-Leaves clambered up immediately on the Elephant's back and tried to stand upright, only to stagger clumsily, and fall at the first step he took. The Elephant was furious at this attempt at deception, and trampled the

boy under his giant feet until nothing was left but a curious, small, red stain on the dead leaves.

Girl-with-the-Perfumed-Hair wept for a long time over the death of her young brother, but then she, too, had to face the trial in her turn. In one quick movement, she climbed up on the Elephant's back, and stepped delicately and firmly from the giant head to the tail and back again, as though she had done this kind of thing all of her life.

The King of the Elephants was overjoyed at discovering this new and beautiful daughter of his, and installed her in a marvelous, airy house high in the biggest and greenest tree in the forest, where she lived for a long time in luxury and contentment.

THE TWO SPARROWS

It was a year of overwhelming heat, huger than any summer. Everywhere in the wood dry branches crackled and dropped in the least breath of wind, and the anxious birds lived from moment to moment, suspended in apprehension, for, in this dangerous weather, they knew what fire could do to their world.

In their sad nest in a withered tree, two sparrows sat, their wings brittle and folded.

"If the fire takes the forest," said the female sparrow, "I shall die with my children."

"And I," said the male, "I shall die with you."

Very soon after this, the fire exploded in the dry grass, herding before it flocks and swarms of beasts, whole countries of terrified birds and animals. The two sparrows, renewing their oath of fidelity, swore again to die with their children, but, at the moment when the fire reached the tree where they had their nest, the male sparrow suddenly took flight, rustling off like another leaf into the clouds of burning leaves. The female sparrow, still constant, threw herself into the bonfire with her children, but first she swore a solemn oath never to speak again to another male in all her lives to come.

Until, in another life:

The female sparrow, reborn the daughter of a great king, remembered the promise that she had carried into death, and would speak to no one but her mother and their female attendants. And so she grew up, in the company of women only, to the despair of the king her

father. When the princess had reached the age of eighteen, the king, at the end of his tether, proclaimed to all the world that he would give his daughter in marriage, together with the whole of his kingdom, to anyone who could reconcile her with the world of men. Princes and kings presented themselves from great distances, but tried in vain to make the princess speak to them, or in any way acknowledge their presence. Until, one day, a certain prince, handsomer than all the others, came to the princess where she sat reading with her women, and, without preamble, began to tell her a story.

“Once upon a time,” he said, “There were two sparrows who loved one another in the forest, and who had many children. Then, one day, in an enormous summer, fire came to the forest. Despairing, the two sparrows swore together to perish in the fire with their children, but, at the moment when it became necessary for them to keep their promise, the female sparrow flew away. . . .”

“O, you lie!” the princess cried. “You lie! It was the male who. . . .”

But she had spoken, and so the musicians began to construct their wedding hymns, and all the kingdom made preparations for the royal marriage.

ANATOLE BROYARD

Look at the Man!

MA, LOOK AT THE MAN! Look at the man, Ma! Maaaaaa!"

Between them they propped up the third whose eyes barely cleared the low sill, and they yelled as if for their lives, the youngest, still wordless, squeaking like a newborn bird. But with all this screeching and beseeching, Ma never came to the window to look at the man, nor did she say or do anything, ever skip a beat in her apparently endless grind, to show that she heard. I might have been just a game they invented.

This went on whenever I pulled back my curtains. And each time I'd return their amazement and ask myself what these tiny neighbors of mine across the alley saw so wonder- or awful in me. Why me of all men? How was I so different from their father, an ordinary-looking guy I'd see every once in a while in his undershirt? I'd have liked to ask them, but I never did. I just kept my curtains drawn, which made my apartment seem even smaller than it was.

Perhaps it was petulant of me in those postwar days, but I sometimes did wish for a bigger and better place. For example, I read somewhere that Nero had a palace built a mile square, with a lake in it and imported animals. The vestibule of this palace was high enough to hold a statue of Nero one hundred and twenty feet tall. The walls and fixtures were overlaid with gold and studded with jewels, and there were dining rooms whose fretted ivory ceilings turned over and rained down flowers (several of Nero's guests were suffocated under tons of roses) while other rooms were fitted with pipes for sprinkling perfumes. The main banquet hall was circular and revolved like the solar system. When he moved into this palace, Nero shrugged off the usual fanfare and muttered that at last he was beginning to be housed like a human being.

My apartment was fifteen feet square—divided into three rooms—and the ceiling was just high enough for you to throw up your hands in despair. The walls had been fretted with plaster where they cracked or crumbled, and the pipes in the kitchen sink and the bathtub next to it breathed their own special perfume, since whoever last unstopped them hadn't replaced the trap which keeps sewer smells from seeking their own level.

One room was a kitchen, with sink and bathtub side by side, a

toilet in a corner closet, gas stove, table and ice box. This was the big room, seven and a half by fifteen. The rest was divided into two rooms, each seven and a half feet square. One of these I used for a closet, and the other served as a combination livingroom-bedroom—or “studio bedroom”—monopolized by a three-quarter bed whose legs were amputated above the knee, a book-case climbing one wall, and an old Magnavox radio-phonograph. Everything but the floor was green, a shade which had promised the Garden of Eden in the can and dried snot-hued on the walls.

It follows from this blueprint that there wasn't much room here for me to get away from myself or see myself in perspective. The apartment was too small even for an elegant or slightly exaggerated gesture. After a few weeks in it, I felt like a flea being trained for the circus. They drop them into a Petri dish, a little round glass container about the size of the things typewriter ribbons come in, and then they clap on the lid. The flea looks through the glass and thinks he can get out, but each jump cracks his head or back on the side or top. This teaches him not to jump, and then he has nothing else to do but follow the perimeter until he's learned to walk in circles in addition to not jumping.

Grand leaps or jumping to conclusions weren't my dish either, and I had learned to follow myself around too, stepping on my own heels, bumping into my penultimate self and smelling the tail-end of my stale impulses. It was this or lie on the bed, my fingers laced under my head. The bed was a raft. It could have come out of a movie I'd just seen, based on a best-seller called *Kon-Tiki*, about a man who set himself adrift on a raft to see whether it would carry him to a particular place and confirm a theory he had. Or his death.

Where was I drifting without a theory? I would ask myself melodramatically from time to time. What but death waited at the end of my voyage? Every morning I woke on this raft, wondering where I was, and what was on the horizon. Other people crawled out of bed in the middle of their own clamor, which was like a radio-clock calling them back to life with the sequel to yesterday's soap opera. They took up where they had left off. But my life was so loose, so full of loopholes, that I fell out of it every night and woke up drifting in a world without gravity. And I awoke not to a clock, but a ringing question: What shall I do with myself today?

This deceptively simple question seemed to imply an infinity of possibilities, and in fact it not only *seemed* to imply them, it actually did, and this is why it was so very discouraging. Show me a man ready

to tackle infinity first thing every morning. What a setting-up exercise!

In the beginning I was satisfied with myself. Egomaniacs—anyone who doesn't work is an egomaniac—miss themselves during the night, and they're always glad to see themselves in the morning. So, over breakfast, I would open my ego as other people open their newspapers. Sometimes to glance only at the headlines—other days I'd scan it from beginning to end, even to the want ads, personals, advice to the love-lorn and obituaries. But this was barely enough to get me through a second cup of coffee, and then the question would come back in an acidulous belch.

Once in a while, depending on how the sun came in the window that particular morning, the vision of unlimited possibilities would shimmer like a fabulous mirage. But I really didn't want the universe—I would rather have had an appointment somewhere, something waiting for me to do it. But what? People I knew who worked regular hours were always trying to answer this question for me, always telling me what I ought to do and how I ought to profit by my freedom. Above all, I ought to go to museums. "Ah, if only *I* had the time!" they would sigh, as if in my place they'd be standing in line at the museums every morning. There was a time when I agreed with them and haunted the museums myself, but that was when I was hemmed in by life. Now I was so overstocked with art and artists that I had developed a nostalgia for actuality.

Books went bad for me too. After all, how many times can you read Dostoyevsky? By now, most of my books were gone, and the empty shelves were ladders to nowhere. One by one, I had eliminated them in a kind of authenticity contest. I weighed them against my most ordinary needs and desires, sold them for the price of a movie, a date, or by the pound for meat and potatoes. The bigger part went after school closed for the summer and my G.I. checks dried up. One afternoon in late August, for example, my stomach was growling and I was pinching the survivors, trying to find a fat one to take to the fair. They were already thinned down pretty far, and the few that remained I regarded as family. I went over them with a thrill of guilt, an incestuous cannibal chief choosing the entrée, but I didn't have the stomach for it—or I thought I didn't. "I can't do it," I muttered for their benefit, while without thinking I opened a rare bi-lingual edition of Lorca's *The Poet in New York* which I knew would bring me six dollars at the Gotham Book Mart if I bargained right. I had always liked Lorca, especially this book, and now I read at random:

Live iguanas will come to bite the unsleeping men
And he who flees with broken heart will meet at the corners
The incredible crocodile quiet under the tender protest
of the stars

I flipped the pages and read again:

A cast-off suit weighs so much on the shoulders
That often heaven groups them in angry droves

My stomach growled. I read a few more lines. Never did my mind seem to work more clearly. I followed each phrase to the end of its meaning, weighed it, judged it. Then I asked myself: What has this got to do with anything? What do I need it for? Who was this Lorca after all—this man I'd been revering as if he were a dear dead friend who had dedicated this very volume to me—what was he but a secret bugger of boys? And the guitar strumming and folk songs—didn't they remind you of the kindergarten communists in Washington Square every Sunday? What the hell—why let the fruit rot in still-lives while I starved? So be it—I decided to have him for dinner, and carried him to the Gotham like a pig to market.

Music was worse. I considered it dangerous, a siren song that poisoned my mind with immensity and always left me with a terrific metaphysical *post coitum triste*. Every time I forgot myself enough to listen, I felt like the war correspondent who said he ran so far in fifteen minutes during a bombing raid that it took him two hours to walk back. These sprints of the spirit carried me to such far places, I was afraid I'd never make it back.

If anyone asked me what I did—this was a very popular question in cliques where no one did anything—I could have said—although I never would—that I was a student, because I did sit in classrooms at the New School three nights a week, this being my only regular occupation as well as my sole source of income under the G.I. bill. To confine my six classes to three evenings and keep them from varying the monotony of five, I had to take courses somewhat outside the compass of my interests, but inasmuch as my instructors' accents were identical, and their indignation at having been chased by Hitler fairly uniform too, the courses pretty nearly converged on the same clichés.

They had two key words, these émigré professors: *dynamic* and *gestalt*. Having been blasted out of their chairs by Stukas, they concluded that conditions in today's world were undoubtedly *dynamic*; and because they never felt really secure in their good luck at finding

jobs and freedom here, they kept insisting that everything must be a *gestalt*, an organized whole—in other words we must continue to stick together.

The crazy thing about the school was that, in spite of everything, it had a busy, successful air. After a diet of communiqués, people were coming back to culture like a soldier back to his wife's bed. All those bombs, everyone felt, must have blown up existing notions and it was time to rummage in the rubble and see what we could find. Also, there had obviously been a failure of communication—Otherwise, how could we have gotten so far from each other that only bullets could reach?—and thus we must study semantics too.

I admit it, I was taken in myself for a while, and by one guy especially who taught philosophy. He had disdainful fingers and the smile of a champion duellist who knew how to thrust home a punch line. Once he even sucked me in so far that I raised my hand to ask a question, something three other kids in my first year at P.S. 44 painstakingly taught me regular guys don't do—by sitting on my chest and pasting me in the question box. He didn't see my hand, but somebody else asked it for me. It was one of those "What do you mean by" questions, and before the boy had finished phrasing it Herr Professor was smiling and posing his spidery fingers. Picking up a pencil and holding it like a man reading a rectal thermometer, he let the question hang in the air until the boy began to blush, then he purred, insidious as Erich von Stroheim, "You compel me to ask—*what do you mean by meaning?*"

I caught on to the con right there. I saw that *Weltanschauung* was a cosmic wisecrack, and I spent the rest of the term studying the susurrant semantics of the blond behind me crossing and uncrossing her silky legs.

Since you're bored anyway, why don't you get a job? people would ask me, prominent among them my mother and father. I already had a B.A. and my father couldn't see much practical use for any more gestalt psychology. When I said I didn't feel ready for a job, he answered with "Why don't you use your will power?" Right there I was struck with the beautiful simplicity of saying "I haven't got any will power, Pop," but I didn't say it.

The trouble was, I didn't want anything enough to work for it, and there's nothing so crazy about that. You need a strong motive—or a different kind of indifference than mine—to work eight hours a day. About as much as I was willing to do was the amount of work required

to, say, seduce a girl. A girl with low resistance. Only I wasn't that interested in seducing girls either. In fact, I had more or less given it up. Somehow there didn't seem to be room enough in my apartment for two whole personalities. There was a time when I used to take girls there, but it never turned out too well. Those were the nights when taking a newspaper home under my arm wasn't enough, when I needed more of the world than that. Like those people who can't resist touching a fence or a wall with a WET PAINT sign, I felt an irresistible urge every once in awhile to get back in touch with humanity. Why humanity always assumed the feminine form I don't exactly know, except perhaps that there's a tradition for this which helps disguise the nakedness of your need. Under the pretext of sex, you can surreptitiously hold hands with another human being.

When I went on these forays, as you go out for a quart of milk, I would have in mind an idea, an aura, an intimation of my species, a Platonic essence, you might say, but then somehow, while walking up the four flights to my apartment, something always changed and suddenly there was this burlesque of breasts, belly and behind, all ballooning out like a blowfish. If they could only have held themselves in a little and given me a chance, but no, off came the bras and girdles and immediately they began to expand beyond all control, like those rubber life preservers called Mae Wests, which inflate themselves as soon as you pull the trigger. Just as nature hates a vacuum and rushes to fill it with a tremendous noise, these invaders automatically thundered into my secret spaces, they sprouted convexities to match my concaves, their every mole became a mountain. I tried various remedies, I picked smaller and smaller ones—I even found a ninety-pounder, a frightened little thing with the absolute minimum of personality, a virtual catatonic “wailing along the margins of nonentity,” but she too turned into the life of the party in my place.

Now, a girl you don't really want is the most enormous irrelevancy in the world—and when she's in your own apartment, your last refuge, the only place you have to go, then it's all the worse, as outrageous as if she were trying to squeeze into your grave with you and cheat you even of this final peace. You soon forget that you brought her there yourself. She forgets why she came, and begins to rationalize her presence, practically pleading with you to claim you're a writer or an artist, to merely mention art, as if it were a glamorous negligée to throw over her sore thumb of a body.

At this stage, a grotesque hospitality, some undiscourageable reflex

of politeness, would usually sweep over me and I'd turn into a regular stomach-pump of solicitude. After that, it was an ashtrayful of autobiography, a few hours' sleep and a toothpasteless goodbye.

Why did I go on with this? You might as well ask why people go to off-Broadway plays. And I'd probably never have stopped, except that an anticipatory gleam of what I knew to be waiting for me began to shine in my eyes and the girls quit accepting my invitations.

A friend of mine who fancies himself a sort of moral tipster advised me anyway to give up this sentimentality and find a rich girl and marry her. But this wouldn't do either, because although my positive convictions were weak or vague, I apparently had very strong and well-defined negative reactions. I didn't seem to mind nothingness one-tenth as much as something that wasn't exactly up my alley.

Naturally, then, I had plenty of nothing. In fact, my days had so little actual content that more than once I found myself unable to remember what I'd done the day before. It was like turning around and trying to peer into a dense fog. This worried me, and so, just as some guys feel an impulse to write "Kilroy was here" on a blank wall, I began to keep a journal. I bought a big thick ledger in a place where they sold seconds. Then I sat down and wrote the date in the upper right hand corner of the opening page. I had to look it up first.

For awhile, I sat there gazing at this little disfigurement on that big page, and presently it occurred to me that this was really all that was necessary to describe my day. After the date—nothing. It was discouraging, and the journal almost ended right there, but then I hit on the ingenious idea of writing this discouraging thought down. Immediately, a forlorn ending was turned into a brilliant beginning, because as soon as you write "nothing" down, it becomes something.

After that, I had no trouble at all finding things to write in the journal. When you take a hypothetical view of life, everything is phenomenal. I was like a kid with a microscope, I wanted to put the whole world under it. One day I caught sight of the tip of my finger as I was shoving a speck up for scrutiny. Seen under magnification that way, it was fascinating, and before long I felt an irresistible itch to turn my magic lens on other parts of myself too.

I began to enter more and more into the spirit of this journal. Day after day, I'd crouch over my table and scratch around in myself like a man with athlete's foot scratching between his toes. Anyone who's ever had athlete's foot knows how delicious it is at first. Such a beautiful desire to scratch, such a sublime tickling on the surface of your skin.

As soon as you start, it seems you can't possibly scratch fast enough, it feels so wonderful. You scratch harder and harder, faster and faster, and the pleasure radiates outward all through you, like morphine.

But then it begins to burn. You find that you've gone beneath the skin and it burns like hell-fire. You can't stop though, you have to scratch harder and faster than ever, even when it's white-hot. Until finally a clear colorless fluid—not blood, I don't know what it is—comes out, as if you'd dug a well in yourself and struck acid at the core.

This is the way the journal went too—and it's not so surprising after all, because whenever I opened my mouth to speak my mind I inevitably put my foot into it. All at once I found myself scratching across those blank pages as fast as my fingers could move. It wasn't fun anymore—I was working at white-heat, flaying myself like an inquisitor. As the cracks began to open up, I dug into them unmercifully—until at last that acid essence came to the surface. I don't exactly know what to call that mysterious distillation—truth? self-knowledge? paranoia?—but as near as I can judge, it seemed to be a sort of acid test of my substance, a kind of corrosive transparency that threatened to burn right through me. I remember Baudelaire writing in his journal “I have cultivated my hysteria with joy and terror,” but I think this was a hollow brag, and anyway, as for me, standing there on my own threshold, I suddenly saw that I didn't want to see. I dropped that journal as I would a hot plate and scrambled back to the outside world where the threats were reassuringly familiar and, above all, tangible.

The boys on Prince Street where I lived were very tangible. They were second generation Italians and they called themselves The Hammers. They supported a social-athletic club—this is what the window read—on the corner. Social was standing so they blocked the sidewalk, and athletic was pool, bets on fights, and elbows out. Or watching a guy gun a motorcycle.

When I muscled into the neighborhood, The Hammers were waiting to nail me. They had their reasons—tradition, exercise, making the world safe for democracy—take your pick. I knew I was a clay pigeon, but I didn't know what to do about it. They were watching for me to make a false move—not that they needed an excuse, but it tickled them to see me sweat awhile. I sidestepped them as long as I could—if they were on one corner when I left the house, I took the other—but there were times when they were on both corners. Then, with a dozen Hammers hanging over my head, I threaded my way through them, and

while I mustn't so much as graze a single one because this would certainly knock the chip off, it was just as fatal to step too daintily around them, because this might look like distaste.

They forced me to give them a wide berth in a narrow street, and kept pushing me into a silent kowtow until, in spite of all the biceps and rolled-up sleeves, I would have been willing to take my chances with any one of them. But this of course was the kind of remedy that killed the patient. If I was lucky enough to win, there'd be another, heavier Hammer waiting, and even if I lost, the sight of my blood would naturally have aroused their curiosity.

For three or four weeks, they leaned their silent weight on me until my nerves were so tight I was all reflexes. Then my day came. I walked out of my tenement one afternoon ready to run the gauntlet, keyed for speed, and found the trap laid right at my door. They had boxed me in with a game of box-ball, my stoop was home plate. I walked out and, finding my way blocked, stopped, unpopular as an umpire. Then I saw the ball coming at me.

In that tic of time while the ball was in the air, carrying their message to me, I knew what it meant—Was I going to *play ball*?—and what I had to do. And I realized too that they had misread me, they didn't know I had passed this test fifteen years ago.

The ball came at me waist-high, dead-center, and hard, and I caught it at my belt buckle. I caught it with two hands, but with style, not reaching out like a greenhorn, but holding both hands against my belly, right cupped over left opening like a clam to take the ball in. When I knew I had it, I flipped it underhand, hard, to the Hammer who had thrown it. He caught it exactly as I had, and then he smiled.

He was handsome and smoother than the others. "Hey, Ace," he said to me, smiling, and then to them, "I told you he was an actor! Ain't you an actor, Ace?"

His voice was a mixture of ironic congratulation and contempt. It didn't warm me much, but there was a hope of truce held out in it, so I said "Yeah, that's right. I am an actor."

"Listen to what Ace says," he cued them. "I told you hard-ons Ace was an actor."

"Attaboy Ace!" Another Hammer slammed me on the shoulder and I caught the blow the way I had caught the ball, pretending not to feel the threat in it. "Listen, Ace," a third threw in, "We can use a good man like you. Go get your jock strap and we'll let you work out with the team."

It didn't come through to me right away that I had jumped out of the frying pan into the garbage can. I learned that later, after they saw me coming home once or twice with a girl. Then they had found a role for me, and I understood what Angelo had meant when he called me an actor. He figured me for a guy who would take cues, who could be directed and made to play a part.

"How do you do it, Ace?" they immediately wanted to know. "What do you have to say to them to get them to open their legs?"

"Poetry," I said, since I had to answer with something. "You just recite them poetry."

Angelo was listening, smirking his prediction. Still I got the impression somehow that he was disappointed in me, he hadn't expected me to take the hook so freely. But I couldn't see yet what I was setting myself up for, and anyway I was thinking mainly of easing out from under.

It wasn't long though before they were pressing for details and technicolor shots, and this was where I had a hard choice. I would be an actor if I had to, but not in my own scenes. I tried to clown out, but they closed in and their voices got ugly. Standing there in the middle like a crumb seized from all sides by iron-jawed ants, I was nervously rummaging around for a red herring when it suddenly occurred to me that this was an ideal opportunity to apply my education. I hadn't studied all that literature and psychology for nothing. First I fell back on a feint that had carried me through four years at Brooklyn College: During final exams, I'd pretend to misconstrue the questions until they seemed to ask for the few answers I knew. Then when the instructors puzzled through my papers, they had to concede that even if half my answers were out in left field, I wasn't a fellow to be flunked, since I did show some cross-eyed acquaintance with the course.

Now, when the Hammers asked me about myself, I took their questions on the ricochet and referred them to literature. I served up Rabelais and Krafft-Ebing with Henry Miller for mustard, and pimping off everything I could think of—from Faulkner's Popeye to Helio-gabalus—I tried to persuade myself that I was needling the Hammers. I opened a whorehouse in literary history, and every time, before I could get through them, they exacted another tale or toll.

This was a fine epigraph to my daily adventures. It was like that Surrealist show where you had to pass through a public toilet to get to the gallery. And the exhibition waiting for me beyond this slop-pail baptism was in pretty much the same style too as the Surrealists' *trompe l'oeils* and second-hand insanities.

C. ROLAND WAGNER

Ritual Nonconformity

A NEW AND POWERFUL RITUAL of criticism has been spreading over the educated American public during the past ten years. It is a ritual of both damnation and celebration. The reputed vices of softness and conformity in American life are damned and exorcised, the essential virtues of hardness and nonconformity acclaimed and celebrated. A while back it was mainly highbrow intellectuals who were at war with America. Now everybody knows What is Basically Wrong with American Culture (though all of us, including the highbrows, really accept America today—we really do). When Lucewriters begin to warn us about the dangers of mass culture (*The Waist-High Culture*) and the failures of American education (“It’s Time to Close Our Carnival”), it is clear that a cultural phenomenon of some importance is with us. Ever since *The Lonely Crowd*, books for every taste have appeared telling the same sad tale in countless ways: for the highbrow, Richard Chase’s *The Democratic Vista*, for the upper middlebrow, Jacques Barzun’s *The House of Intellect* (stamped with approval by Time, Inc.), for the middlebrow, *The Waist-High Culture*, *The Hidden Persuaders*, *The Status Seekers*, and *The Decline of the American Male*, for the academician and others, *The Organization Man* and *The Freudian Ethic*.

Everybody wants to be a “hard” nonconformist these days: *scientists* (“Scientist Pleads for Lone Wolves”), *politicians* (Stevenson: “[We] are frittering away talent, time and resources on trivialities—ranging from quiz shows to Detroit’s chromium creations—while the Russians are concentrating everything on their overriding goal”), *military men* (“Rickover Fears Smugness in U.S.” Says Rickover: “. . . primitive toughness [has] enabled the Russians to survive hardships that would break a softer people”—meaning us, of course), *humorists* (Thurber: “. . . the word I most often heard applied to American writing, including comedy, was ‘conformist,’ a polite way of saying ‘timid.’ Intelligent people among our European allies are still shocked and bewildered by the beating American writers and artists took during the McCarthy era. It is not expected that we will soon recover and contribute to a new and brave world literature of comedy”), *TV comedians* (Sam Levinson: “The parents of America are so frightened, they’re even more frightened than the kids. . . . The parents have to have the guts to be parents. It takes a little courage to face up to a kid who you know is wrong”), *athletes* (Bob Cousy: “American youth is getting soft . . . you can’t get middle class kids interested in playing ball nowadays. They get the keys to the family car when they’re 16 and they’re too busy having a good time to go out for the school team. If they do play, they completely lack competitive spirit because they’re used to having everything given to them”), and finally, *proprietors of prize-fighters’ gymnasiums* (Lou Stillman: “There’s no more

tough guys around, not enough slums. That's why I'm getting out of the business. The racket's dead. These fighters today are all sissies").

Obviously the air is thick with nostalgia for the good old days when men were men. "These kids got dough in their pockets but they don't know how to laugh," says Lou. "The least they could do is make us laugh if they're lousy fighters." Similar complaints have been made repeatedly about the new generation of American writers. Peter Viereck, for example, seems just as disturbed about the young poets as Lou Stillman is about the young fighters, and for essentially the same reasons. A report in *The New York Times* (April 19, 1959) quotes Mr. Viereck's trenchant views:

These poets are too urbane, too smooth. Perhaps this is the fault of prosperity, tranquilizer pills and Norman Vincent Peale. These poets should get their hair messed up. They should earn their maturity.

In the Thirties my generation committed itself to all kinds of causes—some good, some bad. But, with no depression and no war, the present generation is too well adjusted. Nobody nowadays has the guts to be a bad mixer. Perhaps modern poets would improve if they were bad mixers, unadjusted, and scandalously devoid of leadership qualities.

Although these remarks are apparently casual and unprepared, they are worth some careful attention, for they sharply reveal the debasing tendencies inherent in the language of current social criticism. Mr. Viereck tells us that the young poets, as well as the rest of the younger generation, "should earn their maturity." But how can you attain maturity without earning it? Doesn't maturity already imply suffering and struggling through to inner security? Perhaps Mr. Viereck means *apparent* maturity. Perhaps he means that in their Jamesian urbanity the younger poets reveal the form but not the substance of maturity. This certainly seems true, but why doesn't he say so clearly? Is it because of a fundamental distrust of maturity itself? The statement may tell more about Mr. Viereck than about the problems of the younger poets.

"The present generation is too well adjusted." How oppressive and how empty that cliché has become! It is *the* liberal-intellectual cliché of our conservative Eisenhower era. If Mr. Viereck and countless other intellectuals, highbrow, and middlebrow, and beatnik, really knew what adjustment means, would they snort at someone for being "too well adjusted"? They take adjustment to mean almost a denial of the self. The well adjusted man, they imply, is one who sacrifices his radical individuality for the sake of social success. Consequently, the "too well adjusted" man is one who is so anxious to be accepted by his peers that he is afraid to be himself. But a much more positive analysis is certainly possible. The well adjusted man might be one who possesses sufficient inner security to adapt himself to many different environments. Then it would not be possible to be "too well adjusted," just as it is not possible to be "too" mature. But Mr. Viereck is not at ease with true adjustment and true maturity. He prefers to believe that the "bad mixers" of the thirties, who were devoted to "all

kinds of causes"—those Crazy Kids ready to Give Up Everything for What They Believed—were morally superior to the present passive generation. But this is to oppose one form of *maladjustment* to another with no clear ideal of the good life transcending both.

Let me move a degree or two higher in the intellectual scale and examine the presuppositions of Richard Chase's *The Democratic Vista*, a dialogue between the middlebrow and highbrow points of view on "life and letters in contemporary America." Although the book is remarkably sympathetic to the middlebrow position, its final effect is unambiguous support for Mr. Viereck's "unadjusted man." At one point the author even employs the same moral language as Mr. Viereck. One of the proponents of the highbrow argument, the wife of Mr. Chase's spokesman, Ralph Headstrong, comments on the early sophistication of American girls today. She complains of ". . . their weary maturity [which] has come to them as a part of the convention of modern living. They did not have to earn it."

Again the same confusion between real and apparent maturity. And again I ask: how can a truly mature person fail to have earned his (or her) maturity? The modifier "weary" only serves to increase the confusion, since it essentially contradicts the very term modified. "Maturity" is used here to mean Prufrockian sophistication and implies a failure of feeling. Surely, if the term were clearly understood to mean what it does mean, the central ripeness of heart and mind, it could hardly be applicable to the alleged inadequacies of the younger generation. But that, precisely, is the main trouble with Mr. Chase's book: despite its admirable power to stir us intellectually and involve us in its dialectic, it fails to comprehend that central ripeness. Mr. Chase is so concerned with telling us what is good and bad on the cultural and literary scene, that he almost forgets what culture and literature are for. Like the intellectuals of the thirties, who were excellent critics of the social status quo, but were incapable of holding up an ideal of human success in terms of the real possibilities of American life, Mr. Chase is alert enough to social reality but not to psychological reality. Although the older political illusions have largely been destroyed, the basis for those illusions has not. New cultural illusions have taken their place.

Mr. Chase admits that in political life, reconciliation, moderation and compromise have, in the long run, proved themselves valid for us. But cultural matters are different, he argues: American cultural and literary life, at its best, depends upon a continuing dialectic between all the contradictory elements of experience. "As it expresses itself in literature," writes Mr. Chase, "the American imagination, like the New England Puritan mind itself, seems less interested in redemption than in the melodrama of the eternal struggle between good and evil, less interested in incarnation and reconciliation than in alienation and disorder." He finds the essential quality of our life and literature, not in the "final" synthesis of Hegelian opposites, but in their "sustained tension." The best of our

literature, Mr. Chase believes, is concerned with the contradictory awareness of evil and disorder, "but it does not draw its characteristic inspiration from the moral preoccupations that follow this awareness."

Now I have no quarrel with dialectic and conflict: it is the only way that truth, forever new and uncomfortable truth, is ever discovered. My quarrel is with Mr. Chase's apparent assumption that dialectic is an end in itself, that it need not be subordinated to the *human uses* of the dialectic. He is so fascinated with the truth of the irrationality of experience that he tends to lose sight of the moral problem of coming to terms with that experience. Admittedly his analysis is adequate as a *description* of American culture, but for Mr. Chase it is much more: it is an *evaluation* as well. He regards "sustained tension" as the essential virtue of our cultural life: he will not see it as also, perhaps, its essential defect. For how can the mere awareness of disorder be in itself a good unless it contributes to a deeper maturity and a richer human happiness? Since Mr. Chase has already given away "weary maturity" to the conformists, what is left for the nonconformists but the chains of neurosis?

Mr. Chase is occasionally aware of the difficulty. In commenting on the final failure of such men as Melville and F. O. Matthiessen to master the contradictions they contained, he remarks: "Contradiction, which in the healthy organism results in wit, vital versatility, and a strategy for dealing successfully with the confusing assault of reality upon the ego, produced in them deep fatigue that left them mere shells of men." The trouble is that none of the implications of this remark are developed in the remainder of the dialogue. The author never tries to define the elusive mean between the one extreme of Melville and Matthiessen and the other extreme of the fearful conformists. In fact, I doubt very much if he believes that there is such a golden mean. Mr. Chase prefers the morality of a Nietzsche to that of an Aristotle or a Freud (despite his professed admiration for Freud). "It is only a question of power," said Nietzsche: "to have all the morbid traits of the century, but to balance them by means of overflowing, plastic and rejuvenating power." In other words, let us be neurotic, yet not so neurotic that we destroy ourselves entirely. But neurosis is neurosis, and even though we must live with it, why obscure the ethical issue by implying that neurosis is finally good? It may be necessary to live in chains, but would it not be better to be free? Undoubtedly many of us would lose more than we would gain if our precarious and partial integrity were disturbed by the assaults of a painful reality, but that does not alter the higher or more complete value inherent in every failure. If I am subject to some compulsive urge such as gluttony, it is certainly better for me to be able to live with that urge than to allow it to destroy me, but how much better still to be able to moderate it. It may be old-fashioned to say so, but the good, it seems to me, is still good even if we are incapable of realizing it.

Unlike Lou Stillman, Mr. Chase grants a "new competence in family life" to Americans; nevertheless he and Lou and Mr. Viereck are basically

agreed that the "disorder" of the "unadjusted" man and the "bad mixer" is just as important as "competence in family life"—perhaps more important. The middle classes, they believe, have grown so soft merely consuming and enjoying and tending to family affairs that they have very little power left to offer, or even merely to accept, the radical and revolutionary insights necessary for fruitful survival. Middle class life is thought to be out of touch with vital truth and hard reality.

Actually, Mr. Chase is much too generous in accepting the claims of many middlebrows of a "new competence in family life." Granted that there is a new *concern* about family life in America, a new recognition of realities that have been largely ignored in Western civilization and in our American past, the new family competence, I suspect, is not yet with us. At least the cultural evidence in front of my eyes suggests only the *possibility* of success. But perhaps Mr. Chase prefers to believe this because it satisfies his apparent need to make middle class life look timid and narrow *even at its best*. After all, he seems to be saying, what can we expect from a generation whose primary concern is for "a better life in the suburbs for the kids"? Is this the heroic finale to the American dream? Actually, of course, if family competence were really with us, middle class life could hardly have lost sufficient contact with vital truth and hard reality or "have surrendered control of the material development of the country." Since family competence or family maturity is social and psychological maturity itself, it would necessarily touch the roots of life and include realistic use of all social means to improve family life and preserve it in a dangerous world.

Tough-minded intellectuals and other tough guys have always been ambivalent about family life. Today that ambivalence is expressed (often unconsciously) through ritual criticism of conformity and ritual demands for nonconformity in middle class life. If middle class family life is admitted to be successful, it is also condemned as conformist, as not being the kind of success that is wanted; if it is criticized as a failure, it is not thought to fail in the stimulating neurotic way that intellectual life fails. Both success and failure merely serve to enhance the moral uniqueness and grandeur of nonconformity. But what has happened to the good life in the shuffle of the dialectic? The ritualist's hymn of praise to nonconformity is in danger of becoming merely the sum total of that which is *not* conformity. Ritual nonconformity looks about as immature as fearful conformity.

HAROLD ROSENBERG

Arshile Gorky: The Last Move

ARSHILE GORKY SHARES IN THE SUCCESS of American abstract art as one of the founders of the new mode. Dead but a dozen years, he is already half-buried in its mythology. Today, with the prices of his work soaring, featured in exhibitions of "modern American masters," familiar to a growing public in the artistic photo of him as a seated monument of melancholy, with great black eyes, drooping mustache and leathery skin, Gorky is in danger of vanishing into those vacuous regions prepared by modern publicity for those who have "made it." Complementing this estrangement through "greatness"—that word so dear to critics who lack ideas—is the romance of his embattled life in Greenwich Village and Union Square, his departure to fashionable Connecticut and his end in a suicide motivated by illness, despair and jealousy.

Yet Gorky does not fit easily into the popular legend of Abstract Expressionism. Unlike its typical heroes, he stands, above all, for the part of intellect in painting, even in that kind of painting that verges upon automatism and draws upon buried sources. Nothing in his career sustains the conception of an art that is an "eruption" of mindless force. This lifelong student and, as Meyer Schapiro has called him, "fervent scrutinizer" of paintings, old and new, was an intellectual to the roots; he lived in an aura of words and concepts, almost as much at home in the library as in the museum and gallery. In her book on the artist to which we owe so many carefully checked details, Ethel Schwabacher has testified that he carried "some small book of the masters with him at all times" and that he memorized the shapes in reproductions as one might lines of poetry. For him, learning, analysis, and hypothesis were phases of his art work, as drawing and painting were means for understanding life and trying out assumptions about it and about himself. One might say that the idea of getting the idea kept him busy from morning till night.

Gorky's career may be conceived as a succession of dialogues with artists living and dead. There are, of course, in his work echoes of Uccello, Ingres, Cézanne and, most dominantly, Picasso and Miró. Add to this his early friendship with the painter Mischa Reznikoff, his years of walking around with Willem de Kooning, his discourses on benches in Washington Square and the cafeterias where artists hung out in the pre-War days—his most active hours were divided between hard talking, study and the labors of the studio. Perhaps "divided" is the wrong word, for he liked to talk even while painting. Yet Gorky was no chatterer; he talked ideas, values, attitudes: what might have entered his mind as gossip came out as a judgment. He demanded of his talk that it have continuity with his thinking, centered on art—when a fellow he had met at a party dropped in at his studio merely to pass some time, Gorky told him through a crack in the door, "You must be out of your mind!"

It was the shift of his talk into the realm of methodological metaphor and magic transported to these shores by the Surrealists at the beginning of the War that released Gorky's hand for the radical imagery of his final period.

If the mind of Gorky emphasizes the intellectual ingredient in American abstract art, the content of his paintings and innumerable drawings points, from first to last, to a motive in it different from that of "expressionism." In the most dramatic manner, Gorky strove to deduce himself from art and from the traditional image of the artist, rather than giving vent on the canvas to motor impulses of personality. With Gorky, to be an artist counted for more than to be himself. Art was his promised land, in which he sought his place; he was a stranger to the temptation to blast. Even when, in his late drawings he made himself master of the fragmentary, it was the fragments of a world evoked by art, not the random particles of an ego, that appeared in his pictures. . . .

For Gorky, imitating Picasso meant not only a way of painting but an approach to world culture. This master taught by example that the artist today ought to be a living embodiment of the entire history of art. Each of his works must constitute a decision as to what is living and what is dead in the painting of the past. His rumination upon the history of art is also a rumination upon himself. Not individual genius, but this double rumination of the artist upon the legacy of history and his own appropriation of it, is the source of style in this epoch of historical self-consciousness. Paintings and carvings of all times and places (ancient Greece, Renaissance Europe, the African jungle) can be mirrored in it. Recognizing that art has become the collective property of mankind and that all belongs to each, the artist seeks his sources in the common store. He is first of all a critic, whose meditations on the canvas give rise to an art of a new dimension—that of art's awareness of what it has been and is. . . . It is generally acknowledged that Gorky was a great connoisseur of painting; what is overlooked is that becoming one was part of his Picasso discipleship.

The vision of the work of art as a re-animation of existing art was perhaps the most profound and productive esthetic idea of the first two decades of this century. It was an idea with deep roots in literature as well as in painting; it reached back into Rimbaud's "magic of the word" and to Mallarmé's systematic investigation of the poetic accretions of language; it was present in Cézanne's reclaiming of Poussin in nature. Among literary contemporaries of Picasso, it widened into Joyce's re-writing of Homer and of the tongues of man as immediate experience in Dublin, Pound's translations of the poetry and manners of ancient cultures, Eliot's indissoluble formula of the poem as an "objective correlative" by which the poet's emotion leads an independent life within the tradition of poetry.

In both painting and poetry, art as resurrection of art gave prominence to three formal principles: allusion, parody, quotation. Of these, the first is the most profound, the true ghostly principle of historical revival, since by allusion the thing alluded to is both there and not there; while parody

or quotation brings the original work forward either in a distorted form or as a passage in a different work.

Allusion is the basis upon which painting could, step by step, dispense with depiction, without loss of meaning; on the contrary, depiction, as was already well-realized in the nineteenth century, could be an obstacle to meaning, besides having had its age-old mystery extracted by the camera. To the degree that depiction gave way to various systems of allusion—emotional references evoked by color, by shape, by movement—"abstract" art became possible. In this century, every major work of art, whether pictorial or not, is charged—the word is Ezra Pound's—with allusion: to things or events, read, dreamed or half-remembered, but, above all, to high points in the history of its medium.

Parody and quotation, which are forms of allusion chained to specific works, have always, of course, been present in art. To the history-conscious artist, however, both assumed new depth; he resorted to the take-off and to insertions of lifted passages for his most serious effects, as in Picasso's *Grünewald Crucifixion* or Miró's *Dutch Interior* series. These reflections of other works had nothing in common with plagiarism, since the looting was intended to be spotted and the original object thus brought into the new context, as in cubist collage, the most extreme example of quotation in painting.

Allusion, parody, and quotation cut across all contemporary schools (with the possible exception of Neo-Plasticism, though Mondrian regarded his compositions as distinctly allusory); they are as prevalent in Fauvism as in Dadaism or Expressionism, in Léger as in Berthold Brecht; they introduce into the diversity of this century's modes the unity of the style called "modern." They are forms in which is asserted the uneasy conviction of this epoch that "real" art belongs to other times and places, to communions destroyed by our revolutionary age; but in which is asserted at the same time the counter-conviction that art is deathless and that it actually rises to new heights in becoming nothing else than the artist's consciousness of it. Allusion expresses both the despondency of modern art and its enthusiasm, its awareness of itself as "counterfeit" and its clarified confidence in the inferiority of all less history-conscious conceptions.

All through the thirties Gorky was a parodist and "quoter"—first of Picasso, then of Miró, with side glances at Masson and Léger. It was to take a full decade before his art would pass from parody and quotation to the poetry of allusion, and from the "rhetoric" of the individual master to its own use of the common alphabet. While it is true that Gorky's Picasso imitations bore the unique imprint of his hand, particularly in his individual use of color, this did not give them a voice of their own: hang one of them next to a Picasso, the latter does all the talking while the Gorky patiently lip-reads. . . .

Gorky's life as an artist seems organized for the convenience of the biographer. At the right time, he was in the right place. In the Bohemian twenties he inhabited a studio on Sullivan Street in Greenwich Village.

The year of the Wall Street Crash he moved to Union Square, where he remained throughout the decade of demonstrations, artists' unions and government projects. The Depression at an end, he left the Square for Connecticut to become, amid the amenities of the International Set, an augur of the future prosperity of American art.

In the year of Pearl Harbor everything changes for him. The Surrealist flight to this side of the Atlantic has begun and the immigrant welcomes the exiles. The "abstract man" of the Village streets, nourishing himself on the pickings of his brain, is drawn, step by step, into a milieu the elements of which combine, like dream projections, his aspirations towards Paris art and a position of professional dignity in the United States. In tune with an emerging lightness in his paintings—in a 1941 version of *Garden in Sochi*, the forms ride loosely in looped contours and his characteristically loaded paint surfaces have given way to thin washes and illuminated tints—he meets a handsome girl, the daughter of a U.S. admiral, takes a trip to the West Coast, gets married in Nevada. Suddenly, Gorky has broken out of the Village dogtrot, has a home, friends who buy his pictures and invite him to elegant houses; his summers are spent on the hundred-acre farm of his wife's parents in Virginia. In a preview of the future social elevation of American painting, the controversialist of the cafeteria tables has become, as American, a respected member of the international art world.

In the transformation of Gorky, the arrival in New York of the Paris artists was no doubt decisive. In their presence, art ceased to be an ideal, at bottom only half believable, and the artist a part to be played, half sham, half desperate hope. Art was *here*, and the artist a man like other men. The impact of the Surrealists, with their programmatic union of art and daily life, was especially invigorating in Gorky's new domestic situation.

Granted this stimulus by the Europeans upon Gorky and a few other American painters, some critics have seen in U.S. art of the past fifteen years nothing more than a local extension of School of Paris styles—had the Left Bank migrated to Brazil, the same development would, presumably, have sprung up in Sao Paolo. The fact is, however, that, while there was much for the Americans to learn, there was nothing for them to "extend." The debarking of the fugitives upon these shores coincided with an already-existing break in the continuity of European art—the fall of Paris to the Nazis put the seal of force upon an epoch that was ended; when after the War the Parisians returned home they could only repeat their pre-War work. In sum, the presence of the Europeans simply confirmed what the American artist already knew only too well from ten years of experience: that the modern schools were played out and that a new move had to be made.

The clue to this move the Parisians supplied by example. Before the blank wall at which the art movements of the twentieth century had come to a stop, the Americans now saw a parade of single artists as the living residue of the Schools. Cubism, Fauvism, Futurism, Dada were dead, but

Léger, Chagall, Ernst, Masson were working as vigorously as ever. The lesson to the Americans was to begin to seek in themselves for the riddle which they had sought in the history of art or in the history of society.

What do Gorky's late paintings and drawings owe to Surrealism? To conceive him as "taking over" the style of the newcomers is to misconceive the relationship. As a manner in painting, Surrealism in 1940 was neither a force nor a novelty; in that heyday of Peter Blume, it had become an expected ingredient in every all-American annual.

What the Surrealists could impart, *and only in person*, was their conception of the artist, one that happily contradicted the whole "objective" fixation of American painters. In a situation where all ideas were blocked, Surrealism could make its final contribution as the ideology of letting go of ideas. In his grasp of consciousness through immediate experience, the Surrealist painter stood directly opposed to the asceticism of Gorky as the provincial impersonator of The Great Artist. Looking everywhere, in the streets, in private relations, at parties, for their games of "black humor" and "chance meetings," they showed him that art and the artist were one. Given his past, it would not be too much to say that in the company of the Surrealists Gorky was forced into life in order to be an artist. The secret, he learned, lay not in the rigors of emulation but in the gifts of insight, of which one's art was the unique record.

For art to serve revelation, picture-making as an ideal had to be dissolved. Instead of looking to art for direction, Gorky now turns to nature and to his own imagination: *non-art for art's sake*. For the first time he abandons his striving for the masterwork in favor of drawing and painting as a continuous note-taking of vision. No longer is the canvas conceived as an ideal entity standing above the artist as the alter ego of his "miserable" self; it is a record of the art activity to which its creator has surrendered.

Gorky now starts a drawing and looks to it for surprises. He experiments with close renderings of grass and flowers carried into fantasy by the spontaneous intervention of his hyper-trained hand. The loosening of the "classical" stranglehold has its strongest effect upon his composition. His formerly unyielding forms open up to welcome the unexpected, the outrageous even. Tightly impacted organization of carefully limited elements gives way to litter and tiny afterthoughts. Details seem thrown around, or thrown in for their own sake, and one is aware of scattering and "disarticulation." His paint no longer applies itself layer upon layer within an outlined area—it moves, dabbles, sometimes bursts up in a gust like the flame of a match.

Literally beside himself, that is, outside the limits of his self-consciousness, Gorky can now make manifest in his paintings and drawings states of being formerly confided only to women. Erotic signs flood his soul of a Puritan. The sheltered space of *The Diary of a Seducer*, *The Betrothal*, *Charred Beloved*, echoes back that cry of his love letters which is also an esthetic apperception: "this place seems so big without you." This typical sentiment of the stranger is unwound by his art into the vocabulary of

world painting. A "place" of his own is born out of a combination of the seen and the half-thought. His sites seem *phrased* as much as composed, an assemblage of shapes that are also words. "Gorky's gardens flutter with a light and witty *loquacity*," wrote Elaine de Kooning, exactly divining his late landscapes to be a species of visual talk; where "in an overpowering flux of successive and simultaneous images, forms change, as you look, into a cruel and opulent sexual imagery. Accents of bright color suddenly lose their meaning as flower, and become crevices, imparting a strange, voluptuous meaning to the surrounding pale, thinly washed surfaces; or plant forms change into human organs and a riotous pageant is transformed into a desolate landscape strewn with viscera. The general erotic content of his later work is suggested in some of his titles."

In Gorky's jottings of observed, fanciful and spontaneously suggested shapes, pencil and crayon took on new importance. Recapturing without nostalgia the natural world he had lost since childhood, Gorky spent his summers drawing in the fields, the increasing fluidity of his penmanship garnering from the close scrutiny of weeds and the insides of flowers forms which, in being used again and again, became overgrown with metaphor and association. Amid strange, soft organisms and insidious slits and smudges, petals hint of claws in a jungle of limp bodily parts, intestinal fists, pubic discs, pudenda, multiple limbfolks, while angular braces evoke ribcases and African shields. Some of these drawings approach botanical plates or Victorian fruit-and-flower clusters, though without losing their strangeness. Often Masson is looking over Gorky's shoulder. But he looks with amazement; for Masson's metamorphoses follow rational analogy, whereas Gorky's finds have taken him over the edge into the arbitrariness of the imagined.

His derivations from other painters do not cease; one might say that influences flow into him more freely than before. The difference is that they descend to the drawing board by way of the hand rather than the head. Whatever was original in the earlier Gorky was a remainder of his act of lodging himself in a pre-existing image—his originality in the forties is not of this order. For the first time, the totality of the work belongs to him, even when it is made up of borrowed parts. His eye freed from domination by the chosen model, he pours out its immediate data upon his paper and canvas under the prompting of visual and somatic memories of paintings which he has seen or made. Art speaks anew through these gestures, not as a concept but as an inspiring muse. The act of creation protracts itself with undiminished spontaneity through innumerable references.

Gorky's vision now had its source within himself. Yet another still had to have a share in it, this time a share beyond the transactions of art. For Gorky entered his new phase by way of the Chilean artist Matta, this time responding not to a modern "old master" but to a painter younger and less skillful than himself. The effect of this new relationship upon Gorky proved far wider than that conveyed by the much-diluted word "influence." Matta not only succeeded Picasso and Miró as a guide to painting;

he took the place of de Kooning and Reznikoff in another of Gorky's Mutt and Jeff pairs. Like his predecessors he resembled Gorky in being a foreigner and an artist; the identification was moved up a notch in his being also a non-European. Above all, Matta was fresh from Paris and wore the aura of Surrealism as the last movement in art, that is, as the necessary point of departure. In the most fateful sense, Matta became Gorky's double. For a long time Gorky kept him to himself, evading the new arrival's efforts to meet other New York artists through him—I have been told that Matta even tried following him to his favorite restaurant in the hope of running into his friends there. But if Gorky was eager to preserve the privacy of the new couple, the short, rubicund Latin American—with his bright black eyes and his darting mind, attracted to cruel thoughts as the heritage of the Marquis de Sade, the Rimbaud of *Une Saison* and the imagery of Duchamps and American comic strips—played his Jeff up to the hilt. Committed to moral provocations and ruses of destruction, he made of his tall melancholy partner's sortie into life an induction into disaster. As if personifying the dual forces of rejuvenation and death at work in Gorky, Matta pointed the way for him to bring his art into touch with his being, then did not hesitate to break his ego to pieces by wilfully emerging in the desolation of Gorky's illness as the focus of his violent jealousy.

Without this accomplice of his self-discovery and his fate, the art of Gorky's last seven years would not be what it is. Yet the Matta in Gorky's painting belongs entirely to Gorky; here, at last, was invention which he could consume and digest, as Picasso had cannibalized so many of his contemporaries. The recurrence in his drawing of Matta's curious elbow-joint shapes and cartoon flattenings never transports his pictures into Matta's world, as his borrowings from Cézanne and Miró did into theirs. Matta's image is the rigid one of ideological projection; in his paintings of that period, line works as string in conjunction with stretched planes to send flying machines or kites adrift in angry-toned apocalypses of cloud dunes and photographic smears: later, he moved indoors into a universal hospital ward of monochromatic metal bugmen. Matta's ambition to be the mechanic of cosmic space and of man-as-equipment did not tempt Gorky; the latter's canvases are not wired for shock, nor are his compositions animated by gas and pulleys. Having rid himself of the ideology of art's-next-move, Gorky had become content to comb the beaches where passion and esthetic memories meet. With him "dismembered" composition is held to an order of planes inherited from his years of Cubist practice. His landscapes are truly "interior," in that they resist external location, to say nothing of a "message." In the end, the argumentative Gorky turns out to be the most reticent of painters.

To Americans whose conception of abstract art was limited to the Cubist primer, the free intrusion of psychological subject matter was equivalent to mental collapse or a surrender to criminal tendencies. Stuart Davis, Gorky's defender in the early thirties, referring to the "moths sifted into his [Gorky's] prayer-type rug" by the Surrealists, concluded

that he had "settled for a self on a lower level than the potential of his early noble pretensions. He retained his unusual mimetic and virtuoso-type technical talents but put them to the service of an inner landscape where gusts of some very loose-life literature obscured the vista." In a similar vein, another critic, later to adjust his views, had observed: "Gorky has at last taken the easy way out—corrupted perhaps by the example of the worldly success of the imported surrealists and such neo-romantics as Tchelitchev . . . it all goes hand in hand with the renunciation of ambition." That Gorky was consciously establishing a new purpose for abstraction in the visual power of contours, strokes and color washes could not be grasped by those to whom abstract art meant geometrical patterning, over-all design, "flat space."

Still often missed is the fact that the Surrealist notations in Gorky's late paintings are but one element in them, often a superficial one. In perhaps half the paintings from 1943 through 1948, figuration plays a negligible part, in several it is dispensed with altogether. This is especially frequent in sketches made for paintings, as distinguished from his nature studies and his doodling. At all times, Gorky belongs to America's new abstract art, pre-figured by Kandinsky, rather than to a latter-day surrealism.

Dogmas and tendencies aside, however, *The Diary of a Seducer*, a composition of mixed "abstract" and figurative elements, and a product of the middle "last years," is to my mind Gorky's masterpiece. It combines most perfectly three qualities of the some dozen paintings that are the culmination of Gorky's art: esthetic allusion, technical virtuosity, emotional content. This elegant grisaille echoes in the most contemporary terms the harmonies of the museum; rich in metaphors and visual puns it asserts the continuity of art without sacrifice of individual sensibility nor with any trace of platitude or forcing, as legitimate a child of tradition and immediacy as a landscape of Cézanne. Ethel Schwabacher has related *The Diary* to Ingres' *Odalisque* in the Metropolitan; Elaine de Kooning found its composition pat with Ingres' source, J. L. David's *Mars Disarmed by Venus*, which Gorky had seen reproduced on the cover of a magazine. To me Gorky confided that the painting was of a landscape in Virginia. Probably all three statements are correct, since, given Gorky's method, in elaborating the composition from sketches done on the site he would have drawn in features of remembered masterpieces.

Related to other works of art and to nature, *The Diary* exhibits Gorky's manual freedom at its height. Its linear fluency addresses the masters it recalls with the modesty of an equal, while the grand concavity of the whole, built of planes of grey peaked with points of bright color, is toned to a sense of endurance and to the subtleties of meditation.

As its title, contributed if I remember correctly by Breton, suggests, this canvas is also a reflective autobiography (note, for instance, the boat or cradle-like shape carried over in miniature from *Garden in Sochi*). For is not the artist a "seducer," and has not the lone immigrant won his distinction solely through charm? In this "place" that is not "too big,"

internal organs palpitate and the mood is one of quiet expectation and anxiety.

In Kierkegaard's term, both the art of the past and the American landscape have become in *The Diary* "infinitely subjective." Signifying simultaneously on its multiple levels of the esthetic, of nature and of self-disclosure, *The Diary of a Seducer* is an equivalent in painting of a passage in *Finnegans Wake* or one of the *Quartets* of Eliot.

Similar mastery is evident in such other Gorkys as *The Limit*, *Soft Night*, *Agony* (reproductions of this work, which falsify the reds, are particularly misleading). Several of the late works, however, do not succeed to the same degree in setting his figuration into the context of his entire vocabulary. Taken by themselves, his free associations can be mere rhetorical blubbering. Thus attempts to "read" Gorky's pictures for disclosures concerning the pathos of the flesh or the destiny of man seem ill-advised. Not in his metaphors but in the action of his hand in fastening them within their painting-concept lies the meaning of his work.

At the same time, Gorky differs from the Action Painters in that for him the gesture is never a sufficient starting point. His automatism is geared to creatures and scenes rather than to thrust, counter-movement and explosions of paint. This is so even when he gives himself most deeply to "expressive" abstraction, as in his "drip" paintings, like the magnificent *Water of the Flowery Mill*. To the end, it is the clarified vision of the contemplator that manifests itself on his canvas, not the tangle of locked masses experienced by the participant. He observes the image that rises before him; he does not "get into it" as into an arena. Psychologically speaking, Gorky's paintings constitute an investigation of the unknown, rather than an immersion in its currents; their aim is the conversion of data through esthetic comprehension, rather than an organization of the artist's energy as in de Kooning, Kline, Hofmann, Guston.

Yet Gorky was a pioneer in discovering the primary principles of America's new abstract art. With him abstract art meant, finally, not abstracting from experience but making experience over; a sketch became an event which led to another, not a draft to be perfected. For him, as for the Action Painters, the canvas was not material out of which to fashion an object, but a "mind" through which the artist discovers, by means of manual and mental hypotheses, what he is or might be. To this mind Gorky brought accumulations of the hand that have been exceeded by no painter of his time. . . .

B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

AN OUTSTANDING OCCASION IN OPERA this season was the first performance in this country of Berlioz's *The Trojans*: the American Opera Society presented the two parts of the gigantic work in two concerts in New York and two in Washington. The work was not entirely unknown here: from a recording of Part 2, *The Trojans at Carthage*, that was available for a time, one had discovered that it contained some distinguished and incandescent passages—notably the quiet opening and close of Royal Hunt and Storm, and the second-act septet, in which Berlioz produces an enormous effect with such small means as the reiterated C of the flute, the change from this to the oscillation of C and D flat, the occasional heavy punctuating beat of the bass drum; and one had discovered also that a considerable amount of the music was only an accomplished use of the Berlioz idiom in the service of the text. The American Opera Society performance of Part 1, *The Capture of Troy*, revealed only a similar exercise of the Berlioz style, with no incandescent high points like those in Part 2; but having said this I must add that even here the Berlioz mind was in constant operation in orchestral writing that was refreshing and exciting to hear.

The work was to have been conducted by Beecham; but after the first rehearsal of *The Capture of Troy* he became ill and his place was taken by Robert Lawrence, who had prepared the singers and could beat time for all the participants but could not produce the balancing of orchestra, chorus and soloists and the shaping of the work in a real performance. Beecham was incapacitated again for the New York performance of *The Trojans at Carthage*, but this time after he had conducted all the rehearsals and the performance in Washington—with the interesting result that the experienced Symphony of the Air, the chorus trained by Margaret Hillis and the soloists were able, even with Lawrence, to produce again most of the effective and beautiful Beecham performance. Eleanor Steber, the Cassandra in Part 1, was made ineffective by excessive tremolo; and the fine tenor voice that Richard Cassilly, the Aeneas, exhibited in Part 1 seemed to tire in Part 2, in which he sang flat; but even with the wobble in the upper range of her beautiful mezzo-soprano voice Regina Resnik's singing as Dido, in Part 2, achieved moving expressive eloquence; and the tenor William Lewis contributed extraordinarily beautiful singing of Iopas's taxing song. The work of the chorus was excellent; but most impressive and—for me—very moving was the playing of the Symphony of the Air. The group retains only a little more than half of its original personnel of the NBC Symphony; and this hard core includes a number of elderly players with lessened powers; but it also provides a foundation of disciplined ensemble operation for the new members, who include much of the superb brass section; and one hears—when someone

like Beecham conducts—the refinement of execution and tone of what is still one of the great American orchestras.

Its operation was especially striking after the playing of the Moscow State Symphony at a concert a few days earlier. The Moscow group began with Tchaikovsky's *Serenade* Op. 48, in which one heard the precision and excellent tone of the string section; but in the music that followed—the Letter Scene from *Eugene Onegin*, an aria from *The Queen of Spades* and the *Pathétique* Symphony—one heard the remainder of the orchestra, which was undistinguished and worse, the worst being the solo oboe and solo horn, the latter of whom produced a bright, somewhat oily tone with a strong vibrato almost like the tone of a saxophone. If the Russian government's intention was to demonstrate Russian achievement in orchestral performance, it demonstrated with the Moscow State Symphony something not very impressive to ears familiar with the virtuoso orchestras of Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, Cleveland and New York. And if, furthermore, the intention was to demonstrate an authentic style of Tchaikovsky performance, the performances conducted by Kondrashin demonstrated that Tchaikovsky is butchered in Russia in the same international traditional style as elsewhere. How a conductor treats Tchaikovsky—whether he produces what the score asks for, or the traditional distortion of it—is one test of him as a musician; and it is a test that Kondrashin flunked badly: the very first measures of the small-scale *Serenade* were attacked with a vehemence which in the symphony reached such a point of brutality and distortion that I couldn't listen beyond the second movement. Only in the operatic excerpts did Kondrashin operate with continence; and that brings me to the performances of the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya. In the Letter Scene she exhibited the usual thin and tremulous Russian-soprano voice; but in the aria from *The Queen of Spades* the voice was suddenly steady and voluminous, though not lustrous and warm. However, with the unremarkable voice she exhibited the powers of a remarkable singing actress: a slim, attractive young woman in a low-cut black evening gown standing before an orchestra in Carnegie Hall, she created in the *Letter Scene*—with only slight movements of head and arms and slight changes of facial expression—an image of Tatiana's personality and situation that was as touching as the reality would have been.

At a later concert Kondrashin began with a vehement distortion of another small-scale Tchaikovsky piece, the engaging Suite No. 3, of which only the concluding Tema con variazioni is familiar from its use in Balanchine's ballet *Theme and Variations*. Then he produced an admirably continent realization of the orchestral framework of Mozart's Piano Concerto K.467 for Emil Gilels, who played also Tchaikovsky's Concerto No. 2, a work of finer substance than the ubiquitous No. 1. I had previously heard Gilels only in a recorded performance of Chopin's Sonata Op. 35 that had left me with no interest in hearing more; and recently Van Cliburn in Tchaikovsky and Glenn Gould and Leon Fleisher in Mozart have exhibited a considerate mastery in the treatment of their instrument, a clean and finished execution, a continuous piano legato in the service

of an unfailing sense for the continuing musical phrase, that make Gilels—with his unprecise slam-banging of passage-work, his percussive loud or pallid soft tone in insensitive or affected phrasing of melody, his lack of a sense for continuity—sound coarse-grained and immature.

This is the right point, therefore, to speak of the accomplished handling of instrument and music by the German pianist Hans Richter-Haaser in finely conceived and executed performances of Beethoven's Sonatas Op. 101 and Op. 111, which lacked only the additional dramatic intensification and enlargement of meaning that Schnabel gave to the music.

To get back to off-Broadway opera: The Little Orchestra Society's performance of Bizet's one-act opera *Djamileh* had interest and importance only from the work of another impressive singing actress, the mezzo-soprano Frances Bible, and the tenor Simoneau in the first moments of the performance before his ear-ravishing voice became a little hoarse. On the other hand, a group known as Actors' Opera offered less accomplished singers in a more consequential work—Handel's unfamiliar *Ezio*, whose uninteresting first act left one unprepared for the exciting things that came later, notably the aria "I shall be constant!" in which the florid style was used effectively to express the character's exalted defiance. And a Xavier Symphony Society performance of *La Traviata* provided an occasion for a young conductor named Vincent LaSelva to exhibit—in his handling of the modest orchestra and singers available to him—a musical and technical authority that was most remarkable.

As for opera on Broadway, the Metropolitan's new production of *The Marriage of Figaro* had sets by Oliver Messel that exhibited his distinguished taste but that weren't always right for the dramatic action. The first-act room intended for the servants Figaro and Susanna not only was as large as the Countess's boudoir of the second act, but had three doors instead of the usual two (to the Countess's room and the public corridor), which meant that the Count was not trapped by Don Basilio's arrival and did not have to hide but could have escaped through the third door. And the fourth-act garden lacked the prescribed pavilions into which the characters were supposed to withdraw and out of which the Count was supposed to pull them. In the first act, moreover, though the sun-lit landscape could be seen through the window, clothes were drying on a line inside—which may have been a detail of Cyril Ritchard's staging of the work. This was criticized by some for low-comedy excesses which didn't seem excessive to me; but what was open to question and criticism was Ritchard's compulsion to have something going on all the time, and his failure to understand that in opera an aria usually is a point at which action stops while the emotion at that point expands in the music. It was all right for Figaro to do a couple of dance steps with *Se vuol ballare*, and one could accept the Countess's moving about restlessly as she sang *Porgi amor*; but I was as disturbed by her constant whispering and gesturing to Susanna during Cherubino's *Voi che sapete* as Cherubino should have been. However, merely to hear this miraculous work conducted with lightness and grace by Leinsdorf and executed with precision by the re-

cently rehearsed orchestra and singers was an enormous pleasure, even though the singing of Siepi as Figaro, Kim Borg as the Count and Lisa Della Casa as the Countess was less beautiful and distinguished than that of Elisabeth Soederstrom as Susanna and Mildred Miller as Cherubino.

Except for an impressive opening scene, Motley's sets for the new *Il Trovatore* seemed to me fussy and cluttered, but the costumes were beautiful, and the work was staged well by Herbert Graf. And here too it was a pleasure to hear the freshly rehearsed and well-paced musical performance conducted by Fausto Clewa, with several good singers—Antonietta Stella as Leonora, Carlo Bergonzi as Manrico, Mario Sereni as Di Luna, William Wildermann as Ferrando—and one, Giulietta Simionato, who as Azucena was outstanding in beauty of voice, expressive power of singing, and force of presence and projection.

Another new singer was the outstanding feature of the new *Tristan und Isolde*—the soprano Birgit Nilsson, who elicited comparisons with Flagstad that were justified by a voice extraordinary in its beauty, its power, and the apparent effortlessness with which it was produced—the two high C's in the second act being attacked, held and released, like Flagstad's in her first performances, as casually as if they were an octave lower. And like Flagstad's voice Nilsson's was unvarying in its bright timbre, achieving dramatic expressiveness through dynamic inflection. On the other hand, as one who heard Flagstad's first *Isolde* in New York I can testify that her voice on that occasion had a richer luster and greater amplitude than Nilsson's, and that even in her more static dramatic performance she had greater force of presence and projection than Nilsson. In the finely wrought—rather than impassioned—performance conducted by Karl Böhm there was beautiful singing also by Ramon Vinay as Tristan, Irene Dalis as Brangäne, Jerome Hines as King Marke and Walter Cassel as Kurwenal; and Böhm must be applauded for his act of artistic conscience in restoring the music which, at the Metropolitan, has always been cut from the second-act duet after Brangäne's first call from the tower. As for the stage production, there was criticism of Teo Otto's sets for being not modern in style; but by this criterion one would have to condemn Eugene Berman's sets for *Don Giovanni* and *Rigoletto*, which reveal no awareness of the latest styles in scenic design, instead of admiring them for being wonderfully imaginative and beautiful and effective for their purpose. In other words, a set is to be evaluated strictly by what it looks like and what it does in and for the scene; and evaluating the Otto sets for *Tristan* in that way I would say that the one for the first act looked and worked fine; that the one for the second act also was all right (from my seat I couldn't see the moon that was objected to), but Otto would have done better for the singers to give them the traditional garden bench to sit and sing on instead of the grassy bank mentioned in the score; and that only the set for the third act—with its curious golden-leaved tree—could be criticized for its failure to create the somber bleakness one is prepared for by the extraordinary musical introduction to the act. And there was one error in Herbert Graf's well-thought-out deploy-

ment of the action on the stage: in the first act the lovers remained in their embrace for at least a minute after the raising of the sail revealed them to the soldiers drawn up on the forward deck of the ship.

The Metropolitan's *Gypsy Baron* I didn't hear: in my opinion the Metropolitan, which would have no business to produce things like *Show Boat* or *My Fair Lady* or *The Mikado*, has still less business to produce English versions of *Die Fledermaus*, *La Perichole* and *Der Zigeunerbaron*.

Of the series of concerts in which Columbia Records presented Stravinsky as composer and conductor, I heard the final one in which he conducted his newest work, *Movements* for piano and orchestra. The accompanying notes carried Stravinsky's own remarks about the construction of the piece: "Every aspect of the composition of the *Movements* was guided by the forms of the series—the sixes, the quadrilaterals, the triangles, etc. . . . The fifth movement . . . uses a construction of twelve 'verticals'; the listener has to get down and look up through the series, so to speak. The gamma and delta hexachords are more important here than the A and B. And, five orders are rotated instead of four, with six alternates for each of the five, while at the same time I see the six in all directions, as though through a crystal." A friend's observation afterwards—that Stravinsky was now producing music for the eye without aural relevance—described what I had heard in the piece: neither the structural coherence derived from the serial construction, nor coherent expressive connotations. After the Stravinsky piece it was good to hear even a product of Bach's uninspired competence like his *Trauer-Ode*, which Robert Craft conducted in addition to the more attractive vocal pieces by Schütz, Gesualdo and Monteverdi that preceded the Stravinsky.

And finally, the Little Orchestra Society's performance of Handel's oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus* provided an opportunity to hear some characteristically skillful and engaging writing for chorus, a few good solo pieces, the lovely singing of the soprano Martina Arroyo, the impressive operation of the veteran tenor Jan Peerce, the good work of William Jonson's Choral Art Society.

As I write, the New York City Ballet has presented two of the promised three additions to its repertory: *Night Shadow*, which Balanchine created in 1946 for the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo to a score fashioned by Rieti out of music by Bellini; and *Pan America*, a new work that fills the entire evening with a number of pieces by Balanchine and other choreographers to scores by Latin-American composers. *Night Shadow* is concerned with a poet who happens into an early-nineteenth-century party where he becomes involved first with a coquette who presumably is the host's mistress, then with a sleep-walker, who presumably is the host's wife, and for this is killed by the host. It is, then, a piece in which Balanchine's powers of choreographic invention serve his dramatic imagination and theater sense, producing the inanities of the guests' dancing, the banalities and grotesqueries of the divertissements for their entertainment, the impassioned pas de deux of the poet and the coquette, and then a

supreme stroke of *fantaisie Balanchine*—the pas de deux of the poet's encounter with the somnambulist, in which, unable to make contact with her mind, he experiments with her moving body, spinning it, impelling it now in this direction now in that, grasping the candle in her hand and swinging her by it now this way now that. The Bellini music is chosen well for the varieties of movement, with some of his most beautiful melodies for the sleep-walking episode; and Esteban Frances provides a fine set and suitably violent-colored costumes for the guests. In 1946 Danilova, as the sleep-walker, took one's breath away with the intensity of her agitated movement across the stage on points at her first entrance, and the powerful concentration of her quieter movement later in the episode; in the new performance Allegra Kent didn't have this power but took one's breath away with the loveliness of her limpidly flowing movement. Quiet power of presence and projection made Erik Bruhn superbly effective as the poet; the part of the coquette calls for precisely the alluring femininity that Jillana radiated; and Edward Villella's brief appearance in the harlequin's dance was enough to amaze and delight one anew with his soaring and spinning, his sinuous grace even in slow turns.

Pan America—with effective scenery by David Hays and colorful costumes by Esteban Frances and Karinska—began with *Serenata Concertante*, a piece of music by Juan Orrega Salas (Chile) that rattled along pointlessly, with choreography by Gloria Contreras, whose straining invention contrived classical movements and formations different from Balanchine's that had nothing but their labored ingenuity. But later Miss Contreras produced some engaging music-hall-style entertainment to the somewhat more attractive *Ocho por Radio* of Silvestre Revueletas (Mexico). Francisco Moncion's ingenuities, in his attempt at escape from the Balanchine idiom—to a piece of bad music, the *Choros No. 7* of Villa-Lobos—were at times a little more interesting. John Taras, making no attempt to escape, used the Balanchine idiom effectively with *Variaciones Concertantes*, an agreeable piece by Alberto Ginastera (Argentina). And Jacques d'Amboise dodged around the difficulty by producing not a dance piece but a skillfully made Grand Guignol horror piece to music whose quality I cannot recall, the *Sinfonia No. 2* of Hector Tosay (Uruguay). As for Balanchine, his ever freshly inventive imagination produced a superb pas de deux to *Preludios para Percusion* by Luis Escobar (Colombia), which provided no more than a minimum sound-track for the movements; an adagio in the wrestling style of the one for Diana Adams and Arthur Mitchell in *Agon*, but this time for three dancers, which was the outstanding thing in the big work that Balanchine put together to some bad music by Chavez (Mexico), the *Sinfonia No. 5* for string orchestra; and an attractive big piece in popular style to the engaging *Danzas Sinfonicas* of Julian Orbon (Cuba). The performances that call for mention are those of Patricia Wilde and Bruhn, and later Wilde and Villella, in the Balanchine pas de deux; Diana Adams, Moncion and Magallanes in the wrestling adagio of the second Balanchine piece; Violette Verdy,

Villella and Wilde in the Taras piece; Bruhn and Verdy in the D'Amboise piece.

Additional brilliance in the superb company was promised not only by the participation of Bruhn but by the return of Maria Tallchief; and in the *Swan Lake* that opened the season Bruhn fulfilled expectation with his intensely expressive dramatic performance and with the leaps and turns accomplished with quiet elegance that make him the pre-eminent *danseur noble* of today. But Tallchief's very first movements brought a shock: the well-remembered Tallchief image—of lovely bodily deployment and configuration achieved seemingly without effort—was now gone (as on an occasion years ago the radiance that Tatiana Riabouchinska's dancing had spread in earlier years was suddenly gone). One waited for it to reappear; but it did not in this *Swan Lake*, nor in *Symphony in C* the following week, nor in *The Nutcracker*; only in the special style of Eurydice's part in *Orpheus*, with its twists and angularities, did she operate impressively. Bruhn, in those classical ballets, continued as dazzlingly as he had begun; and in one performance of *Divertimento No. 15* it was exciting to see the difficult details of the Fifth Variation executed this time with a reserve of technical power that gave them complete assurance and elegance.

Among the dancers in new roles, Verdy contributed her clearly and beautifully articulated and outlined movement to the Dewdrop part in *The Nutcracker*, the first movement of *Symphony in C*, the Melissa Hayden part in *Agon*, and was a brilliant Firebird; and Moncion, substituting for D'Amboise, operated in the Op. 10 of *Episodes* with an additional power that made one wonder why he hadn't been used in this piece from the beginning. In the revival of *The Prodigal Son* Moncion was replaced by Villella, who in the opening scene—after sauntering onto the stage like a youngster from Brooklyn—leaped and spun more effectively than Moncion, and who was moving in the final scene of the return, but who was less adequate than Moncion in his pas de deux with the siren, and didn't even begin to achieve what Moncion used to achieve in the scene after the despoilment—the long line of movement, continuous in outline, flow and tension, from the moment that he began to sink to the ground to the moment when he dragged himself off the stage. Susan Borree of the corps was excellent in the solo parts she was given in *The Nutcracker* and *Divertimento No. 15*. And Conrad Ludlow, evidently intended for solo activity, exhibited extraordinary and touching warmth and sweetness as partner of Kent in *The Nutcracker* and of Tallchief in *Danzas Sinfónicas* of *Pan America*, but revealed in the *Nutcracker* pas de deux that army service had cost him some of his elevation in leaps and turns.

WILLIAM McNAUGHTON

Lysistrata at the Phoenix

THE PHOENIX THEATRE'S *Lysistrata* fell so flat early in December that it embarrassed everybody. Director Jean Gascon, of le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in Montreal, and Dudley Fitts collaborated on this revival of the classical comedy; the collaboration was lacking some essential fire, although nobody seemed to know quite what it was.

Lysistrata failed at the Phoenix because it had no libretto. The collaborators put it on like a chatty Restoration comedy. All the Mack Sennett stunts they imported to speed it up couldn't conceal the fact that this was only half a play. Attic comedy was half "drama" in a recognizable modern sense, half song-dance ritual, and you can count the lines. Attic theatre, that is, was more heavily musical than almost anything that gets on the modern stage—in fact Attic tradition runs on in opera, and the modern dramatic stage follows its line back to the Romans and their less formal, more "realistic" theatre. The Phoenix did *Lysistrata* as if the play were "new comedy," and the result was a ghastly parody of what Aristophanes wrote.

Director Gascon must have sensed that something was wrong. His efforts were interesting because he was a desperate man, bravely running in what he hoped was the right direction. He kept the actors moving nervously around the stage; he outfitted the women with grotesque padding, as prescribed by the Oxford Companion (in this case enormous busts with false little nipples); he used a battering-ram painted like an Atlas missile; he had the females hit one of the aggressive males with a custard pie; he stripped down his choruses to pale tights and fig leaves; in fact his desire to use the externals of Attic comedy stopped just short of overgrown phalloi. Unfortunately, the direction he ran in wasn't the right one.

Custard pie is no substitute for a swinging antistrophe, and this *Lysistrata* played just like a *Figaro* done recitativi only. Dudley Fitts's reputation as a translator of Greek rests solidly on his many published versions of the classics, but with the unstageworthiness of his version of *Lysistrata* made so manifest, we can perhaps better define just where that reputation should begin and end. Fitts's English is precise and clear; his turns are modern, subtle, topical—and the conversational parts are perfectly fine, the rhythms of the dialogue are good and its feel is fairly good. But the rhythms of Fitts's chants and songs are heavily conversational: the defect showed through at its worst when the cast cut up a chorus and spoke it, a sentence from this actor a sentence from that actor, *as if it were conversation*.

Aristophanes moves from dialogue to chant to song with a careful metrical modulation, and the changes play on the emotions quite as directly as sliding from one key to another in music. The organic pattern

in an Attic comedy is vital, and even opera has not exploited all the resources that lie in the Attic "ground." Fitts's translation, however, when it gets to the chants and songs, sloughs off disastrously. In a passage, for example, that calls for a touch of Vachel Lindsay, Fitts gives us:

What a siege, friends! Seventeen ranks strong
we stood at the Gate, and never a chance for a nap.
And all because of women, whom the gods hate
(and so does Euripides).

It's enough to make a veteran
Turn in his medals from Marathon!

Fitts's translation appears even more acutely lacking when there is some dancing to be done:

Damn
These men and their wars,
Their hateful ways!
I nearly died before I got to the place
Where we fill our jars:
Slaves pushing and jostling—
Such a hustling
I never saw in all my days!

If a man offers a written translation of Greek drama without considering the problem of *dance*—the rhythms and music of the art—he is maybe conning himself a little; but if he presents a staged version with scarcely any choral dance or choral song, and no good music to back it either, he is trying to con us every one.

All this metrical subtlety and elaboration is the beating heart of Greek comedy, and in the originals the verse strophes *had* to "swing" because somebody had to dance to them. Aristophanes didn't get his reputation merely by writing bland iambic trimeter and good dialogue. And he won't get his reputation back until somebody recreates his work in its original musical validity. If Fitts or Gascon had put a drummer, flutist and guitar player on stage and taught the chorus a couple of simple dances—if they had made the audience pat their goddam feet a little—the Phoenix production might have been something to send all those disgruntled puritans home happy.

Reviews

W. D. SNODGRASS

Four Gentlemen; Two Ladies

READING THE LATEST INSTALLMENT of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*,¹ I feel a little as if I had married a romantic, schoolgirl poetess, only to discover (the honeymoon safely over) that she has turned into a lady executive, much determined to save souls, mine in particular. No doubt her long-term blueprint for my life will work to my own benefit; surely I will be slimmer, healthier, happier, when I learn to conform to her schedule; no doubt I will be wittier, more convincing, more fun at parties, when I have, finally, memorized all those phrases which she has written on flash cards for me. Yet, at the moment, I can think only of the moment's loss of instinctual satisfactions: doctrine instead of passion, heat instead of warmth, vitamin pills instead of meals.

If Homer's use of epithets can be called (by Gerald Else) "mail-sorter's verse"; if Empson's use of puns can be called (by himself) "crossword-puzzle verse"; then this may be called "flash-card verse." And life with Ezra has come more and more to be a daily mid-semester test. I must spend hours each day watching him flash (a little faster each day) note cards containing significant phrases (a little shorter each day) past my nose. For each snippet of phrase I must produce a full historical context together with the received interpretation. Should I pass this test I prove my love so strong that I have laid aside my own vision to memorize his.

Of course, Pound has always had these inclinations. Yet some of his cantos have also sung; there *have* been long, sustained passages, many with a heavy musical or ritual content, to carry us through. I need only mention the splendid hell cantos, the usura cantos, or such superb passages from the Pisan sequence as the famous "vanity" passage from Canto 81 and the morning incantation of Canto 79:

The moon has a swollen cheek
and when the morning sun lit up the shelves and battalions
of the West, cloud over cloud

Old Ez folded his blankets
Neither Eos nor Hesperus has suffered wrong at my hands

O Lynx, wake Silenus and Casey
shake the castagnettes of the bassarids,

the mountain forest is full of light
the tree-comb red-gilded
Who sleeps in the field of lynxes. . . .

In the new section of cantos, the only such passage occurs in Canto 106:

¹ THRONES: 96-109 DE LOS CANTARES, by *Ezra Pound*. New Directions. \$3.50.

amples of a pre-fixed meaning. It is like having one's meat pre-chewed by a solicitous mother, then passed down the table until it reaches us. Much like the Bible (cf. Auerbach's discussion of its paucity of detail), the *Cantos* demand our complete spiritual subjection. It would be proper to call it, not a "poem containing history" as its blurbs ambiguously claim, but rather "a poem using history."

The jacket blurb for the preceding section of cantos, *Rock Drill*, describes Pound's theme as "the domination of benevolence." No doubt that is what Pound intends. Yet, I think we are right to view that benevolence with some reserve. As Simone Weil points out, those who find themselves without political power are always, for the moment, "on the side of justice, the general good, and things of that kind, that is to say, among the beautiful things which don't exist." When they achieve power, they must face facts once again—including the facts of their own intention. And if I am to judge from that area where Pound *has* power—poetry—his insistent domination of my mind grows finally very binding and distressing.

I think we do well to suspect that domination regardless of stated intentions. I find the urge to enlist under any benevolent Throne or State (existent or nonexistent), thoroughly resistible; I am continually reminded that it was the Army indoctrination course which most successfully used the flash-card, teaching us to select those we would kill with a minimum of thought beforehand.

In the passage from Canto 98 mentioned above, Pound admonishes us once again to "Make it new." Reed Whittemore, on the other hand, reminds us in his new book ² that

. . . we pull down, pull up, push out
And generally persevere with our renovating—
That is, making new again—knowing
That houses like our house are not made new again
Any more than a man is.

It is a chastening reflection, worth some thought.

Pound and Whittemore seem opposed in every quality and every belief: where Pound writes of the ideal state, Whittemore writes of the most commonplace facts of everyday life; where Pound is clipped and obscure, Whittemore is rambling and quite explicit; where Pound preaches in deadly earnest, Whittemore comments with an offhand comicality; where Pound is proud, Whittemore is humble.

Surely everyone will agree that Whittemore is very funny and that, even on first reading, his book is a pleasure. He has an admirable sense of what exists, and can do a fine little elegy on "The High School Band" or, in "A Storm from the East," can really give the feeling of a family quarrel:

Their house faces east, is protected by trees
From winds from the Gulf which (the weatherman says) prevail

² THE SELF-MADE MAN, by Reed Whittemore. Macmillan. \$1.25.

In that section; but a correction
 Is due (of the thesis, or maybe the house),
 Since, for three days, from the east, a preeminent gale
 Has frozen, through sweaters and sweaters, both husband and spouse.

They have an unspoken agreement that they will be surly
 Unto each other, and any intruders
 For the duration. And they have kept it,
 One refusing to talk, cook or sweep the place,
 The other composing briefs for his side of the case,
 And watching gulls fight for dead fish, as the wind blows.

They have children, too, but are keeping them properly cowed
 Until the storm drops (or the children), at which time the patter
 Of tiny feet will again be allowed,
 And the oldest may even stop asking what is the matter.

They have love, too—put away, put away, while they fret
 About the injustices done them; life and no mail.
 Oh, when will the wind die down, weatherman, and let
 What is so be so, what prevails prevail?

Again, he can take on the persona of “The Tarantula” and make him into one of those helpless, half-learned, self-revealing things one turns up under cocktail glasses:

Furthermore,
 I have to cope with the digger wasp of the genus
 Pepsis; and despite my renown as a killer (nonsense, of course),
 I can't. Petrunkevitch says so.
 Read him. He's good on the subject. He's helped *me*.

And, aside from the weak ending, the poem stays that funny throughout.

That is enviable; I would be sorry to have missed Whittemore's book. Yet I feel oddly dissatisfied at the same time. Whittemore is somehow just too *nice*. It is a little like meeting some Randall Jarrell who had fore-sworn the use of his teeth, though still intent on gumming us to death. Whittemore's natural bent seems to be toward satire and wit, yet he is determined to be always amiable, always reasonable. The only way he can do that is to talk on and on, ramblingly, qualifying everything until it has been qualified out of existence—or at least out of importance.

Thus, when he moves against follies, it is only against such obvious follies as the popular magazines, Griffiths and DeMille, or Mary Baker Eddy; the more significant and less obvious forms of chicanery are not mentioned. This attitude is damaging not only because it excludes so much; there are also points at which it directly enters the poems and does positive harm. For instance, in “The Self and the Weather”:

If I must lie
 On this rumpled bed with my clipboard and pencil

And moodily stare out windows at wet leaves,
 Wet grass, wet laundry and so on, hearing the thunder
 Rattle, and thinking that last night the weatherman said that
 Today (!) (irony)
 Would be a *marvelous* day—if, as I say,
 I must lie here and weakly succumb to such outdoor trivia,
 Then the least that I or anyone trapped with a clipboard
 Should (always should) do
 Is not this.

True.

This is always true.
 It was true some time ago when Antony ditched
 The Egyptian fleet—a girl was the weather
 That day—and true too when Macbeth found somebody
 Sitting where he was to sit (but the chair was empty).
 Indeed one could dazzle the world with instances, mostly
 From Shakespeare, proving
 That any man of resolve, any man with a mission
 Should not
 Do what he does but should rise (always rise)
 To where it is sunny. . . .

The fact is (and Whittemore's irony cannot really contain this) that Cleopatra and Banquo *are* very different from bad weather. They are not just gloom and drizzle; they are lust and guilt. And both mean something important about the human factor in the history of nations. It is not a question of whether they are outdoors or indoors, sunny or gloomy; it is that they are not trivial.

Even the title of Whittemore's book contains an irony which seems inadequately explored. Of course those who invented the term "self-made man" used it for quite unworthy aims; they were fools. The fact remains that there are people in this world whom we value more than others, and that most often we value those who *have* taken hold and fashioned themselves toward what they thought they should be. It may be seldom and only with difficulty, yet sometimes a man, a house, a nation, is made new. And sometimes it is better. Thus, the ironies of "The Self-Made Man" or of "The Man Who Could Do It Himself" ultimately become easy and false. They become, in part, a brief for the weary, middle-aged passivity which pervades the book and is openly recommended in "A Summer Idyll":

"Let sun's declension
 And back stoop hold thee firm against ascension."

Regardless of whether or not this is bad advice, there is a sort of self-deprecation involved which becomes very unpleasant. This accounts for much of the book's insistence on aging, its rambling style, its continual anti-climactic quality. In a few of the poems, Whittemore offers the

standard excuse—that the rise of science and the downfall of Christianity rob him of belief in the importance of the self; he is too intelligent to believe it, though.

Finally, I begin to suspect that Pound and Whittemore are not so completely different after all. Whether Pound speaks *at* me, or Whittemore speaks *for* me, neither will grant me more than minimal importance. In both cases, I resent that.

Robert Duncan's new book³ brings together poems from his whole career. His voice is neither so remarkably individual, nor so fully formed as Pound's and Whittemore's: not only does the voice change sharply as one moves through the collection; one has the impression that further changes will probably still occur.

The stylistic problem to which Duncan has apparently addressed himself most constantly, is that of broadening his voice. The earlier poems in his book are heavily literary and, in some degree, derivative. This is not to say that they are, *per se*, unsuccessful; some of them, like "The Mirror" or "The Piano," work very well. There is, though, a dullness about the style which contributes nothing to a sense of movement inside these poems.

Yet, in these early poems, this same heavy style was of considerable use in carrying the poem while Duncan was facing and settling a problem (comparable to the later language problem) in his basic plot strategies—how to merge the mythic with the immediate experience. The first poem in the book, "Toward an African Elegy," is already wrestling this problem: by the time of "The Homecoming" he appears to have it well in hand. He is ready, then, to begin exploring and broadening that language which, by now, had become a hindrance in itself.

His first attempt to break out of this language is in *Homage to the Brothers Grimm*; here he completely rejects his older style and builds a flat prosy diction which has no interest in itself, but directs attention instead to the basic image-invention of the poem. This is the ending of "The Robber Moon":

. . . . The cook
frightens the robbers. The swollen light
swings
back and forth, snaring the robber beast
and the robber beast and the robber beast
until the murmuring stops.

Leaving the hills, I'll say I left the Moon.
But I saw the Moon go
who had my heart for supper, fat with light.

Not only does that conjure up the Grimm fantastic tone; it seems thoroughly successful in its own right.

Having established a second language, Duncan then tries, in "The

³ SELECTED POEMS, by Robert Duncan. City Lights. \$1.00.

Venice Poem," to marry these disparate forces—myth and everyday reality, literary elegance and workday language. Not that it always works, even here. Surely all of us dream of writing a poem that will contain lines like

I no longer know the virgin mirror.
Sometimes the diadem of poetry. . . .

and also lines like

the forlorn cocksucker is not wonderful.

Even though I don't think it works for him, I am glad that Duncan made the effort. There are many fine passages in "The Venice Poem" which could only have come about through the strain of this attempt. "The Venus of Lespuges" has some exciting experiment, and "Coda" is superbly agonizing:

When you come to this moment the mind goes dead.
It will never restore when you cry out in need
the faith in which there was no need.
When you come to this moment and you are left over,
you rise to the occasion and death won't come.
When the love-light perishes and lusting has gone
and you try to make up love in the marriage bed,
you will long for the violence of the approaching wars. . . .
When you lie in the bed and know with a start
that the vows are broken—You face with a grin
and damn your mind that searches the fact
where your lover lies panting in a new lover's arms,
holds on and comes in some secret room
lifted again to the passionate pitch. . . .

That settles all the problems (except the emotional ones) admirably. Duncan's more recent poems, which completely abjure the literary style, seem less satisfactory—lack the basic imaginative invention to carry their flat language. I cannot help thinking that it is to some language much like the mixed style of "The Venice Poem" that he will have, eventually, to return.

Winfield Townley Scott's⁴ stylistic problems seem almost diametrically opposed to Duncan's (news which I am sure both would welcome). Scott's first tendency seems to be toward a flat, undecorated language, as unpoetic as possible. Because of it, he will often, in those poems which are not strengthened by an urgent subject or some pressing occasion, fall into flaccidity or vacancy—as in "The Difference"—or into simple sentimentality—"The Mother" or "Frieda 75." The problem even arises in some of those poems where he handles, with considerable success, difficult sexual material—"Wax" or "Merrill's Brook." In both cases, he is so scrupulous to avoid overworking his materials that he fails to take quite the authority

⁴ SCRIMSHAW, by Winfield Townley Scott. Macmillan. \$1.25.

demanding of him. At other times, he seems simply to lack the style to handle the small subjects. Thus, though all his poems are worth the reading, many fail to reach that ultimate definition required of a poem.

I do not mean to imply that all his shorter poems fail; that is not at all the case. Sometimes he can pull, poke, gouge and shave his language into something at once tough and knotty, spare and musical. "All Memory" begins:

The trees smoke with fog.
Old ghosts around me.
After the rain spoke warm air, cold ground,
Slow, coastal wind,
Woke these, but not to walk;
To talk what I recall.

Or again, "The Last One" begins:

Now all that name are gone:
Friends and relatives
Summoned—but left to come
Are nurses, acquaintances.

And there are others much like these—"Re-Run," "Two," "The Wrong is Mixed," "What I Assembled and Dissemble." Scott is able, also, to open out these shorter pieces into comparatively longer poems—the fine "Codicil for Pvt. John Hogg's Will" and the hilariously pathetic "Mrs. Severin":

Mrs. Severin came home from the Methodist Encampment,
Climbed naked to the diningroom table and lay down.
She was alone at the time but naturally told of it afterward.
"Lord! Lord!" she had called out. "Thou seest me. Wherein
is my fault?"
When she heard of it, second-hand, Mrs. Birchfield laughed
till she cried.
"My God!" she said, "I'd like to've seen her getting up there!"
For Mrs. Severin, you see, was a very stout old lady,
A spilling mass by buttons, shawls, pins and ribboned eye-
glasses held together. . . .

Yet it is in the longest poems in the book that Scott discovers his full powers. The "Bermuda Suite" is very good, particularly the first section, "The Voyage"—which belies much I have been saying by launching into a heavily literary language, and sustaining it beautifully. The strongest poem in the book, though, is surely "Memento"—for the death of Bessie Townley Scott, whom I assume to be the poet's mother. I had been regretting the fact that I could find nothing in the book to equal Scott's terrifying poem "The U. S. Sailor with the Japanese Skull"; then I re-read the third section of "Memento":

This lady's memory of these things is gone.
 Of us and sixty-seven years her knowledge
 Is gone. While you stare down at her long-loved face
 The nonexistence which shakes you is your own.

Now you have come to stare at the statue of death
 Its terror is in your recognition of it and,
 Unlike a real statue, its failure to change,
 Its inability to respond. And this conceived you.

From what you know, from what you can bear to see
 This must be buried soon. . . .

That, I think, goes far beyond the melodrama of Duncan (the fear of being "left over") into the realm of tragedy. There is nothing here of self-pity, self-torment, neurosis. It is simply the loss that the world demands, which cannot ever be evaded. Since more real, it is both more terrible and more endurable. And I cannot think of anyone, except Scott, who could have written that.

Jean Garrigue⁵ seems to start, much like Duncan, with a tendency toward a heavy and artificial language. She proceeds, however, not to extend, but rather to intensify these qualities. Both gains and losses are involved.

First of all, Miss Garrigue is extremely skillful; if one were to compare random snippets selected from her book and from Scott's or Duncan's, one would think *them* out of the running. And once she has established her ornate, periodic style, she maintains it with remarkable skill and grace. Here is the beginning of "Primer of an Italian Journey," a sort of variation upon "L'Allegro":

And here is sorrow, pleasure's son,
 Come so soon and once again.
 What did I do to beget him?
 Greenness grows; on hills with towers
 Fields are patched in royal squares
 Of the reddest flower known.
 And in those wide-spaced groves
 Vines strung taut between the trees
 Make such hazards down the rows
 A tennis-courting bird might play
 At flying gauntlets every way
 While vines strung up and down the boughs
 Turn simple tree forks into lyres.

That is lovely; one could open the book to almost any page and set one's finger upon just such a passage.

And that is one of the troubles: so much elegance, so much eloquence, so much polish. Soon the lines stop making sense; one is carried away

⁵ A WATER WALK BY VILLA D'ESTE, by *Jean Garrigue*. St. Martin's Press. \$2.95.

much as he might be with Poe. Or perhaps one needs to be carried farther. At any rate, I have a sense of being between stools.

Miss Garrigue appears to have learned from Milton much of how to sustain a long sentence, spun out and strung to dry over the line endings until it envelops whole paragraphs. At times she even seems ready to challenge him in the non-stop sentence derby. And it is true that Milton's mature language has qualities of elegance often unrelated to the qualities of the thing he is talking about. But that is because, as he tells us, he cannot fully describe that greater Reality which is his full subject. After making every attempt to describe it philosophically, he must go on (through the music of his verse) to suggest that the real meaning is something beyond anything he can ever *say*.

Miss Garrigue's language, similarly, directs us from the thing talked about. Yet she makes no more extended attempt to define a greater Reality than what we find in "The Rose Tree":

There was an instant when delight
Lived for the pure rose tree
Then all became as one
With the rose tree in the sun
Time, and you were overcome
By such transparency.
Time, and let me dream
This instant may come again. . . .

At the same time, her language is not so magical, so completely dislocated an incantation, that we forget the denotation of the words to be swept up into celebration—as we might be in some of the poems of Dylan Thomas (another of her influences) or of Hart Crane. To say the same thing another way, the eloquence of Milton and Thomas distracts us from the thing being said only to redirect us toward the true object and meaning (the Reality of God or the reality of our own exultation). Miss Garrigue's eloquence seems an end in itself. There is a danger that all objects and meanings may evaporate; there is a triple danger that in this absence the subject will come to be the virtuoso performance of the poet herself. This would be exactly the wrong sort of distraction.

But this sounds unkind than what I mean. These are good poems and show Miss Garrigue as a very large talent. She herself suggests that she is aware of the problem; one section of the book contains simpler, somewhat Frost-derivative poems which try to break away from the rolling, easy cadences of the rest of the book. I don't think this solves the problem, but I think that we have every reason to expect some remarkable poems to come out of her struggles with it.

Finally, to round out all these comparisons and contrasts, Mona Van Duyn.⁶ Her first leanings seem much like Scott's—prosy, discursive, firmly committed to the facts of this world. Yet there are important differences.

⁶ VALENTINES TO THE WIDE WORLD, by *Mona Van Duyn*. Illustrated by *Fred Becker*. Limited edition. Cummington. \$10.00.

At least in this present book, there are no large efforts comparable to Scott's "Memento" or "The U. S. Sailor with the Japanese Skull"; consequently there are no comparable major triumphs. At the same time, there are none of the failures or half-resolved poems; each of these poems seems achieved and delightful. Again, in developing her style, she has not pushed (like Scott) toward a gnarled and crabbed lyricism; she moves instead toward a discursive style in which she tempers her natural awkward prosiness with a quiet and eccentric music. The result is something quite airy, peculiar and gracious. Here is the largest part of one of her poems on the christening of a godson:

I've thought that the dream of the world is to bring, and
again bring,
out of a chaos of same, the irreplaceable thing,
so, when it dies, we may clap for that brilliant wasting. . . .

This black bubble eye of a pike, ringed with gold,
that neck-wattle, leaf veining, shell crimp, tailfeather, holds
marvel enough. But it's we who're the perfect, pure manifold.

Each sculp of feature is sole. Each skull encloses
trinkets, museums of rarities, whole zoos of wishes.
No one's repeated. We're spent; earth is dazzled with losses.

Farewell and farewell and farewell; yet we honor each going
with a feast of awareness whose richest flavor is knowing
our breed as snowflake, ourselves as yesterday's snowing.

And there's always something new under the sun
that warms toward our thaw. Look, the gifted air swarms
with it, falls from the weight of it, all those shapes, storms

of fresh possibilities. Now spindling down, we see one
who'll drift near us. With special pleasure we watch you come.

A long quotation; yet this language, so generous finally, makes so few claims for itself that shorter quotations would scarcely represent it.

Nearly all the poems in this book deal with love, marriage, children—with the common domestic problems. That is a sharp limitation upon the book. As Rilke tells us, for the poet whose aim is praise, the great test is how much of the world's misery and sorrow can be digested into that praise. It is not that Miss Van Duyn ignores the suffering in her material—it is only that her material excludes such wide realms of experience. Yet, sometimes it is good to know one's limits. Miss Garrigue, trying for the grandest themes and ranging over most of the globe and history, sometimes gives the impression (because of the stylistic problem already described) of having neither theme nor subject. Miss Van Duyn, trying for so much less, always gives a sense of some significance, and (because of her range of diction, which can describe birth in paratrooper's terms, or marriage as a World's Fair landfill) of a fairly wide world of solidly

realized objects. Much that is excluded from her subjects sneaks in through her style. This contrast is not meant to reflect against either poet. I am merely trying to establish a difference: Miss Garrigue wants to move onto the same shelf as Rilke; Miss Van Duyn has decided that is not her league.

Perhaps I am misled by the lovely job of bookmaking that Cummington has done for these poems. Or perhaps misled by my approval of what Miss Van Duyn is saying. I must confess that if someone said, concerning the relation of the poem to the world:

. . . I've never seen anything like it for making you think that to spend your life on such old premises is a privilege. . . .

I would probably like it even in Deaf-and-Dumb. Again, I may be misled by my belief that Miss Van Duyn's imagery and diction can teach me a good deal. Yet again, perhaps I really am right—that Miss Van Duyn, neglected as she has been, has written some poems which will seem genuine for a good long while.

At any rate, it does seem just about time that somebody sent this world a valentine. And if I were a poor, old, monstrous, pragmatist pig of a world (as who shall say I'm not), I can't think of who I'd rather get one from.

ANTHONY HECHT

To Thy High Requiem Become a Clod

THE ONLY ONE OF THESE BOOKS ¹ in a bi-lingual edition is *The Lay of the Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke*. It is one of Rilke's earliest works, and his most popular one. But you would never suspect from reading it that he was likely to become a great poet. It is a costumed and scented horse-opera of a kind that cries out for TV. The hero, a youth of eighteen, of remarkably feminine beauty, has never known love, and is riding forth with his companions, all equally beautiful, to fight the Turks. They have lace at their wrists; it is the middle of the seventeenth century. But when M. D. Herter Norton translates "*Und da schämt er sich für sein weisses Kleid,*" as "And at that he is ashamed for his white

¹ THE LAY OF THE LOVE AND DEATH OF CORNET CHRISTOPHER RILKE, by R. M. Rilke, translated by M. D. Herter Norton. W. W. Norton. \$3.75. NEW YOUNG GERMAN POETS, translated by Jerome Rothenberg. The Pocket Poets Series, City Lights Books. \$1.00. LYRICS OF THE MIDDLE AGES, edited by Hubert Creekmore. Grove Press. \$4.75. POEMS, by Boris Pasternak, translated by Eugene Kayden. University of Michigan Press. \$3.95.

dress," she confuses the sexual definition of the poor hero more than is necessary. He comes to a castle, there is a countess, there is a seduction on a stormy night, the next morning when they awaken, the castle is in flames, he must save the flag, he bears it, burning, into the enemy's midst . . . nothing is wanting but the commercials. The work is a long prose-poem, a reverie, its style removed, heady, and impressionistic. Shortly after the original publication, Rilke himself had the good grace to remark that this work called "for much forgiveness." The translation is a reasonable facsimile.

This journal recently published some excellent translations from the German of Erich Kästner by Jerome Rothenberg, who now offers in his English the work of ten young German poets. (The oldest is forty-five, the youngest, twenty-six.) They have all been through what is very likely the worst period in the history of their country, and it is not surprising that their tone should be grim, for the most part, and full of horror and bitterness. But it is surprising that in trying to find an adequate language for their vision they should have fallen back on the nightmare tricks of surrealism.

. their inarticulate faces
Reveal a crafty smile, like soup that's growing cold. . . .

In the afterbirth of our terror
The dung-maggots grope for new food.
Good Friday a hand hangs on view
in the firmament, two fingers are missing,
it cannot swear that everything,
everything never existed and nothing
will ever exist. . . .

Lips force their way between the
twisted hands of strangers
Black and blue marks, walls that hear
And keyholes, then a

Tender dance on cables care-
ful in that atmosphere of
Vultures beaded eyeballs, pillars,
searchlights; . . .

The translator calls these poets "a new avant garde," but if his translations are at all just, it seems to me that the poets have elected to write in the style of the old avant garde. It would be easy enough to believe that the quotations above were taken from the collected works of Tristan Tzara or Eugene Jolas. I am not sure I know why this should be so. Perhaps it is because the accumulated horror of recent German history cannot be regarded in any way that seems straightforward and direct. But it is hard to keep an anonymous style of this sort from being an evasion or a mere excuse for violence. And it is hard to keep such radical subjectivism from

being no more than self-indulgence. The fantastic and hideous images from the unconscious certainly have their place in poetry, and they are no doubt universally available. The dear old gentleman who faithfully brings crumbs to the pigeons in winter may have nightmares as foul as the next man, and Bosch knew very well how monstrous and vivid these presences might become to a saint in the desert. They are demons, our secret evil longings, and they are very real. But these images exist outside of time, eternally, everywhere, and in their submerged and terrible domain we are pretty much alike. It is history that makes us, or lets us be, what we are uniquely, and gives to our lives their singular stamps and profiles. Of the ten poets, I liked best the work of Hans Magnus Enzenberger, Günter Grass, and Paul Celan. These, more than the rest, seem to have distinct and individual voices. I suspect, however, that I have not been fair to Mr. Rothenberg's zeal, or to the poets themselves. What we need is a larger selection, with the original on the facing page.

Lyrics of the Middle Ages is an attractive book, and a very mine of translators' problems. Its editor, Mr. Creekmore, in an effort to be thoroughly representative, has assembled poems from no less than fourteen different languages, including Danish, Old Norse, Dutch and Welsh, along with the more familiar European tongues. And so to all the old stumbling-blocks some new ones have been added. English, with its meager stock of rhymes, has always had trouble keeping a *Ballade* of Villon from sounding like a doggerel tour-de-force: thirty-six lines, religiously fixed in their rhyming positions, and only four rhyme sounds for the whole thing. Italian and Provençal forms are sometimes just as ungainly for us. The result is often what sounds like light banter when it is mournful and solemn in the original. Another problem in form is presented by the popular medieval Portuguese songs, appearing here in English, Mr. Creekmore tells us, for the first time. They are refrains, subtly varied from stanza to stanza; and that's all; just the refrain, gently modulating through the lines. There is no drama, nothing happens except in a musical sense, and therefore what is wanted is that exquisite music of language we identify with the songs of Campion and Jonson, though both Englishmen are too witty to be faithful equivalents. There is nothing like it in English, even in this book. And here is another problem: should the translator render a poem in our liveliest modern idiom, or try to suggest the quaint and archaic past? The book opens with some blunt, colloquial, racy versions of the Greek by Dudley Fitts, but it is not long before we are in the thick of the Pre-Raphaelites.

The broad quaint odorous leaves like hands
 Weaving the fair day through
 Weave sleep no burnished bird withstands,
 While death weaves sleep for you;
 And many a strange rich breathing sound
 Ravishes morn and noon:

And in that place you must have found
Death a delicious swoon.

This is a good deal more like Burne-Jones than the handsome medieval woodcuts that decorate the book. And add, if you will, to all these problems, an editor's obligation to include an important poem even when it is not well translated.

The royal banners forward go;
The cross shines forth in mystic glow,
Where he in flesh, our flesh who made,
Upon the tree of pain is laid.

This is rotten, and in several ways, only the least of which is that it is an inaccurate translation. But could the compiler of such a book properly omit the famous Good Friday hymn by Fortunatus? Among the skillful translators working for Mr. Creekmore are Wyatt, Surrey, Cowley, Dryden, Shelley, Byron, Longfellow, Swinburne, Coleridge, and poor old overworked Rossetti. This in itself would be enough to explain a remarkable diversity of styles. Of the contemporary translators the most familiar names are Pound, Rexroth, Nemerov, Barbara Howes, Robert Fitzgerald, and Mr. Creekmore himself, and they are also among the best. And I suppose it is not surprising that the poems that seem to come across most easily are not the sacred ones, nor the serious love poems that demand a special delicacy of statement and music to be believed, but the raucous, irreverent and bawdy ones that are cruder in feeling.

For many years it has been an article of simple faith with me that Boris Pasternak is the greatest living Russian poet, and perhaps one of the greatest poets alive. I have taken this on the authority of my friends who know the language, and who assure me that, among other things, Pasternak's translations of Shakespeare are almost perfect renditions, and superior to those in any other tongue. We have now offered to us a generous sample of the poet's work, from the beginning of his literary career, through the poems of *Dr. Zhivago*, to several new ones written since the novel came out. They are translated by Eugene M. Kayden, and Pasternak, who obviously knows English very well, has given the translator not only his approval but his praise. Moreover, Marc Slonim, who commands both tongues, remarks on the dust-jacket: "For the first time the reader can discover in English, through Kayden's translation, all the beauty and originality of the Russian poems."

It should be said at once that Mr. Kayden approaches his poet in an attitude of reverence amounting almost to idolatry. He has written an introduction and some helpful notes at the end, and the tone of his prose shifts uncontrollably between moist-eyed veneration and a sort of petulant, proprietary loftiness, like a rather irritable priest passing along the dogma to the laity. A note on the poem "Hamlet," for example, begins, "The title is not a matter of chance or whim," as if anyone who read the poem could possibly think it was. The introduction gives us the translator's

credo, which is a strange combination of humility and arrogance. "I have shunned, in my translations of him, the literal and the neutral; I have preserved what is literary and ripe in contemporary speech; I have not aimed to make my versions faithful to schoolroom notions of cramped accuracy—but faithful to the spirit of Pasternak's vision of life. If I have at times narrowed the compass and delicacy of his lines, failed him in versatility, passion and lyric loveliness, I have at least lived with his mind and spirit for many years . . . heartened in my timidity by his counsel—the hint of a translator to a translator—to have the courage of imperfection." This passage reminded me of André Gide's introduction to his translation of *Hamlet*. After remarking that all previous translators had striven to come closer and closer to Shakespeare's thought, Gide says, ". . . *c'est ici que ma traduction va différer des précédents; . . . Shakespeare n'est pas un 'penseur'; c'est un poète; et sa pensée ne nous importe guère sans les ailes qui l'emportent dans l'empyrée. C'est cet essor de la pensée qui nous importe ici. . .*" And after this tribute to the wings of Shakespeare's poetic genius, upon which M. Gide also intends to soar, he proceeds to translate *Hamlet* into prose. And yet no translator is without impudence, nor, unless he is offering us no more than the most pedestrian of prose cribs, does he hope to do less than take on some of the stature and imagination of the man he is translating.

Having no Russian myself, I have compared Mr. Kayden's versions, when possible, to those of C. M. Bowra, Babette Deutsch, Bernard Guerny, and George Reavy, and I should say that, on the whole, Mr. Kayden's are probably the best.² And yet in his hands the poetry far too often

² Mr. Reavy's book of translations appears at almost the same time as Mr. Kayden's, covers pretty much the same span of Pasternak's career, and also has, like Mr. Kayden's, Pasternak's personal blessing. There are several important differences between these two new translations, but the differences are as nothing when compared with the similarities. This might strike you as only to be expected, but the similarities I'm speaking of here are the ones that distort and stunt the peculiar qualities of the English language. In this matter I find Mr. Reavy the more at fault, since he was born to the language, as Mr. Kayden was not; and because in his long introduction he identifies himself as a poet who was associated, in his undergraduate Cambridge days, with a small avant-garde review called *Experiment* along with such distinguished colleagues as William Empson, Malcolm Lowry, and Richard Eberhart, among others. He offers some samples of his own poetry in the course of his introduction, and I shall forbear to comment upon them, but there is no doubt that his translations suffer from all the vices of style and errors of judgment that are to be found in Mr. Kayden's versions. And there is this additional ground for suspicion: Mr. Reavy cannot write very respectable prose. Here are two astonishing sentences from his introduction. "Evgenia, née Muratova, [Pasternak's first wife] to whom Pasternak has dedicated several poems, including 'The City,' she was a painter." "Mrs. Zinaida Pasternak [Pasternak's second wife] was extremely upset not only by the general atmosphere of all-pervading fear in 1936-38 and even more so by her husband's fearless attitudes." After having been reminded by Pound that we have been reminded by Victor Hugo that poetry should be at least as well written as prose, I am bound to regard Mr. Reavy with considerable distrust.

has to fight an up-hill battle against staggering odds of technical incompetence and amateurishness. Again and again Mr. Kayden's meters march away with the inflexible juvenile precision of the Knickerbocker Greys on parade, and once or twice he makes Pasternak sound very much like Longfellow's "Psalm of Life": "In the breeze that asks the branches / If it's time for birds to sing, / Like a sparrow wet with raindrops, / O my lilac bloom, you swing!" Poem after poem is filled with cumbersome inversions for the sake of rhyme, functionless words or archaisms for the sake of meter, a heavy dependence upon such rhymes as "destiny," "immortality," "agony," "history," "futuraity," "magnanimity," and his syntax is often puzzling in that his pronouns loose track of their antecedents. The compulsive determinations of meter and rhyme, Mr. Kayden's singular taste for lines like "O world, O Life, immortal Time!" his ability to make Pasternak at times sound like Emily Dickinson at her very coyest,

It seems from long experience,
None will dare deny
The snow is born in secrecy
Only to mystify.

He tricks you out, sly reprobate,
He turns you fair and white,
And brings you from some frolic home
Far too late at night.

—all these are heavy handicaps to the reader who is trying to get to the real quality of the original. And yet that quality is strong enough to overpower the translator on many occasions, and to come through, it almost seems, in spite of him. The poems have a tremendous tactile, concrete density to them, the rich texture of the physical world, the muscular action of the body, the thick presences of trees at night. And if, as I think, we can feel the girth and weight and motion of this substance, this is due after all to the devoted effort of Mr. Kayden.

But there is more to Pasternak's poetry than his relish of substantiality. A translator must also render a poet's tone and attitude, what is unstated but implied. A sense of difficulty here can be seen if we compare the last three stanzas of "So Be It" in the versions, first of Mr. Kayden, and then of C. M. Bowra.

The breeze is at the door, the same
That huddled, trembling, near our house
At night, and shivered in the rain.
Let life be always new again!

That fellow's singularly odd.
Why does he barge into the guard?
The sign is plain: "No thoroughfare."
Let life be always new again!

Then wave the traffic flag in air,
 And play the master of the day,
 As long as men this darkness walk,
 And while the country is in flames.

The breeze is at the door again.
 At night he shivered, wanted us.
 He froze when daybreak came with rain.
 May life be always fresh as this.

He is astonishingly queer.
 Why rudely past the gateman press?
 Of course he saw "No entrance here."
 May life be always fresh as this.

Still with a handkerchief to shake,
 While mistress still, chase all about—
 While yet our darkness does not break,
 While yet the flames have not gone out.

The differences are astonishing enough. In Mr. Bowra's version there is a sense of delight in audacity, and straightforward satisfaction. If there is darkness, at least the flames have not yet gone out, and the breeze sets an example of sheer bumptiousness and good-humored impetuosity by deliberately affronting authority, and pushing in past the sign. Mr. Kayden, on the other hand, is far more solemn. He feels that out of this disaster and senseless hodge-podge, life will somehow renew itself, and we must act as if we knew what we were doing even when surrounded by chaos. His "fellow" is not the breeze, as it is with Mr. Bowra, but some stray human caught in a senseless act, a pathetic symbol of the surrounding senselessness. Pasternak wrote this in 1919. I cannot tell which version is closest in feeling to the original. But though it may indeed be Mr. Kayden, I look upon him with a certain suspicion, for in matters of this sort, when there seems to be a possible ambiguity of tone, he invariably elects for the most solemn. One of Dr. Zhivago's poems, called "The Miracle," is about how Jesus cursed the barren fig tree so that it withered. The poet then goes on to remark that perhaps, if the tree had been given any freedom and choice in the matter, at the last moment nature might have come to its aid and put forth her abundance upon it. "But a miracle is a miracle—and miracle is God." This is the next line, according to Mr. Guernsey, and it is far apart in tone from Mr. Kayden's, "But a miracle is a sign—an act of God." The first has in it some of the sardonic, terrifying humor of the Book of Jonah: a tree or a prophet is bound in the end to look foolish even in his (its) most heartfelt attempt to fulfill the will of God, which is unworldly, and therefore in our terms, absurd; part of God's miracle resides in the fact that we cannot will to perform it; we are given

freedom of choice, not in order to be "free," but to fulfill the will of God, which is beyond our understanding, so that we might as well not be "free" in the first place. The second version seems to me a flat and mindless piety.

And yet despite all these problems, something emerges from the book with splendid clarity. It is Pasternak's obsessive theme throughout: life is richly and relentlessly embroiled with history, and art, in the same way, is embroiled with life. The theme is stated in the very first poem in the book, but it receives its most complex articulation in the first and last poems of *Dr. Zhivago*. The last one is called "The Garden of Gethsemane," in which Jesus agonizingly accepts his mortality, even while praying, "Father, let this cup pass from me," and finally, foreseeing his own death, sees also all the ages of history die one after another, and come at last before his judgment seat. In the first poem, Hamlet, even as he prays, "Father, let this cup pass from me," accepts his terrible destiny, and strains to see into the future what fate awaits the age that will die with him, and at the same time will leave him still alive to play the same part upon a different stage. This is not an attempt to convert Hamlet into Christ; it is the image of man in the toils of art. Hamlet is doomed, and he knows he is doomed because he knows what he must do, *must* do because his very nature will not let him do otherwise, and because the plot is inexorable. He is indistinguishably an actor playing a part in Shakespeare's play, the Prince playing his subtle and terrible part in the chicanery of the Danish court, and Man accepting his mortal role in the great pageant of history. And of course these poems are authored by a doctor who is himself the creature and victim of history and art.

GERALD WEALES

Appearance and Nature

NORMAN N. HOLLAND has a mission and a theory. He wants to save the Restoration comedies, at least the best of them, from the morality-mongers and the social historians who have damned or praised the plays for all the wrong reasons. Audiences, he contends (mistakenly, if he means American audiences), have always embraced the comedies, and scholars have done their work well, building the factual-biographical settings in which the jewels must be displayed. Only the critics have failed. Now comes Professor Holland,¹ like Mirabell at the end of *The Way of the World*, to open the neat box of his criticism and to reveal the theory which, like Mrs. Fainall's deed, will confound the villains and untangle the confusions.

¹THE FIRST MODERN COMEDIES, by Norman N. Holland. Harvard University Press. \$5.50.

Still, if my analogy holds, and if Holland is correct in assuming that Congreve's play is about the cyclic nature of the world, new villains and new confusions may be expected. That problem can be faced in its own time (as Petulant says, "All's one, let it pass"); *The First Modern Comedies* is the business of this review.

Holland's book sets out to show that the Restoration comedies are not simply the frothy or smutty plays that they are sometimes taken to be, but that they are intellectual comedies or, at least, that they are designed on a serious comedic idea. His method is to examine in detail the work of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve, the best of the playwrights, in the light of his own convictions about their plays and to intersperse his examinations with general chapters in which he relates the informing idea of the comedies to contemporary thought, particularly to the scientific and philosophic ideas that were popular at the time. Holland assumes that Restoration comedy in general and the eleven plays he examines in particular are concerned with the problem of appearance and nature (he consciously avoids the appearance-reality contrast). Society imposes certain forms (appearance) on the natural man who is, according to the metaphors that the plays use, "sexual, appetitive, and aggressive." This contrast between the inner and the outer man is a societal necessity and, particularly in Etherege, is even desirable. The hero, at this stage in the development of Restoration comedy, is the man who is able to see through the appearance, to use dissimulation to balance his natural against his formal self; the fool is the man who takes his appearance for nature, who becomes a victim of his affectation. With Wycherley, came the introduction of a double-edged concept of right and wrong. In *The Country Wife*, for instance, Horner, the false eunuch, is *right*, meaning *successful*, but Harcourt, the bumbling lover of Alithea, is *right*, meaning *good*, and Horner is somehow *wrong* in relation to Harcourt. At this point *good* and *clever* begin to separate and the rake-hero is differentiated from the lover-hero, whose entrance whispers that the sentimental comedies of the eighteenth century are on the way. Holland further assumes that not only did the age dictate an appearance-nature split, but a fact-value split as well—science explained cause-and-effect; it did not proclaim an infinite pattern—and that the distant paradise of the late seventeenth century is reflected metaphorically in the marriages that close the later Restoration plays, which become sanctuaries of personal emotion, escapes from society. Thus Valentine in Congreve's *Love for Love* only achieves his heaven (Angelica) by giving up his rational attempts at dissimulation (up from Etherege) and by declaring his faith in love by an irrational act—the renunciation of money and the woman. There, much abridged—probably much distorted—is the Holland thesis on what the Restoration comedies are about.

I find myself wanting to say, with Sir Fopling Flutter, "Thou art a man of wit," but the words that keep creeping into my mouth are Sir Frederick Frolick's: "Now do I feel more qualms than a young woman in breeding." It is all too neat. Art, particularly so public an art as drama, obviously reflects its time, its country, the philosophical, political, scientific

climate in which it is produced. Just as obviously, art is always in a state of becoming—going even if no place in particular, changing even when it appears most static—as its societal and ideational context is being altered in and by time. Every artist, every playwright reaches back to the men who preceded him, using them whether in love or anger, and forward to those who will follow. This connection implies a history of literature (and of ideas) in which there is a perceptible continuity. The danger is that a line of continuity, Etherege to Wycherley to Congreve, may be “converted upward” (to use Holland’s phrase for a particular Restoration trope) into a description of the development of a particular genre. As though he were beguiled by an age in which the universe was beginning to turn into a pocket watch, Holland has turned Restoration comedy into a kind of machine, powered by the appearance-nature conflict, in which each of the three leading playwrights has made his contribution to mechanical or aesthetic efficiency.

The Restoration-comedy car, by means of a coupling hook (foh, sir!), the idealization of love, fastens into the eighteenth-century sentimental play. But what about the hook on the other end? Holland is perfectly well aware that Restoration comedy owes much to the English drama that preceded it; in a chapter on Restoration adaptations of earlier comedies, he traces some of the similarities. His heart, though, is with the differences. For the sake of proving that these Restoration plays *are* the first modern comedies, he must make a definite break with the earlier drama. He does this by pointing out that in Tudor and Stuart times, the general assumption was that appearance and nature should coincide, that even if a king might smile and be a damned villain, he should not; after the Restoration, appearance and nature not only were not one, but there was a general supposition that they should not be. I have no quarrel with his insistence that the two groups of comedies are different by virtue of their periods, but I do not think that the finality of his division is justified. Shakespeare’s Ulysses, and Homer’s too probably, is a good Restoration rationalist in this matter of appearance and nature, and those reformed rake-heroes who win the virginal but witty heroines by a candid confession of love (not done in sophisticated society) are trying to make appearance and nature conform, or at least they suffer from the kind of nostalgia for a supposedly simpler time that John Osborne displays today in his longing to be an Edwardian. Holland cannot have it both ways; he cannot have the step-by-step growth of Restoration comedy and the sharp break with the past. There cannot be both evolution and a first man; the dividing line is so thin that you cannot quite put your soul on it.

I seem, somehow, to have strayed from the specifics of Restoration comedy to the problems of literary history. I have not really lost my way. The implication of the paragraphs above (I hope) is that Holland lets himself be guided by preconception (even informed preconception) so much that it is easy to be suspicious of his neat, abstract, intellectual patterns. For me, most drama—certainly most important drama—is a matter of appearance and nature. *Oedipus Rex* is about a savior who discovers that he is the

impurity and then becomes the savior he thought he was; *King Lear* is the story of a no-father king who becomes a no-king father. Since any play worth a second look is both a product of its culture and a possible product of mine, there are really no first modern comedies. What Holland has done, it seems to me, is to take very valid cultural and philosophical attitudes as they are reflected in the theatre and turn them into a too rigid formula for measuring the distance between 1630 and 1670. In the same way, his description of what really is going on in Restoration comedy is far too abstract: idea modified by idea modified by idea. I do not intend to quarrel with his basic assumption that the plays are concerned with the appearance-nature conflict. In the first place, I find the idea attractive; in the second, to answer him I would have to produce my own neat formula for understanding Restoration comedy, and I do not have one.

What is more, I do not want one. John Galsworthy—of all people—once wrote somewhere that there were no theatrical movements, only individual playwrights working. Galsworthy himself is proof enough that the individual works in a climate that often produces something that looks very like a movement; still, he makes sense to me. Congreve is not Wycherley; *The Way of the World* is not *The Country Wife*. Holland makes this abundantly clear in his book, but he does so largely in terms of an abstraction that becomes modified in terms of further abstractions. His approach to the comedies is a useful one, but the problem of appearance and nature crops up in relation to his criticism. Is he talking about the comedies or an idea of the comedies? and which is appearance and which is nature? Any Restoration comedy—say *Love for Love*—is a separate artistic unit. Although it may be rewarding to know how it differs from an abstraction, the Restoration comedy, and the way it contributes to the definition of that abstraction, it is a product of much more than its generic line. *Love for Love* is not only the result of Congreve's debt to Wycherley and Etherege and the scientific and philosophic ideas of the time; but of his debt to Anne Bracegirdle, which he paid; of his desire or need to reach the audience that followed Betterton to the new Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre; of so many personal and public imponderables that one cannot begin to list them. I am not suggesting that such multiplicity should stifle the critic, but that it should make him beware of forcing a play too neatly into a mold. In discussing *She Wou'd if She Cou'd*, Holland says, "Etherege so proliferates this kind of unfavorable comparison that it almost seems to lose any kind of pattern or direction," without following the implication of his statement to the probable conclusion that Etherege was using conventional sexual comparisons and simply did not have a pattern or direction.

Two last points on the appearance-nature conflict, one of them connected with this business of too rigid interpretation. Almost every Restoration comedy deals with the conflict on the simple level in which some fool pretends to a virtue (social or moral) which he does not have. Although the mannerisms are contemporary, that kind of comic typing is at least as old as Socrates in a basket floating through *The Clouds*. Audiences

expect such characters, actors like to play them and satiric writers (which the Restoration playwrights claimed to be) dote on them; so every character in every play is not necessarily there to fulfill an overall philosophic pattern. (*Write in a comic maid for me, Mr. Shadwell, she said, and I'll let you see my oranges.*) The other point is more important. Holland never makes clear what the forms are that society demands. He touches on them often enough, but since his comments turn up in the discussions of different plays, the forms shift. He seems, however, to assume that there is a one-to-one, form-to-nature relationship. I suspect that the relationship is more complicated: that there is first an appearance demanded by society, one based on certain verbalized concepts of right-and-wrong which have no meaning in actuality (Lady Fidget's pretense of virtue); that beyond that there are actual societal values, money and sex, the acquisition of which gives one social status, for instance, the accolade of envy (Horner's notoriety); finally that beyond that there is the possibility of some personal value (or emotion) which may be acceptable to society, but which is not dictated by it. Such a division would take care of the problem about the author's attitude toward his rake-hero. All the Restoration playwrights, even the stupidest, handled the first kind of appearance. The second, however, looked like reality to some playwrights and so the rake-hero, the successful societal man, was actual hero in many plays; although Holland would disagree, I suspect that Dorimant in *The Man of Mode* is such a hero. Whether or not Etherege belongs in their company, a few playwrights—Wycherley and Congreve certainly—dealt with the second kind of appearance, recognized the rake-hero as the cultural hero of what might be called the Restoration success ethic and indicated that he was just a more complex societal pretender. The third division is probably pretense, too, but we can leave that possibility to Pirandello.

I have gone on at such lengths about the implications of *The First Modern Comedies* that I have left no room to say that Norman Holland knows what he is doing when he sets out to analyze a particular play and that even if one does not buy his total pattern his book cannot help being of value to anyone who agrees with him that the Restoration comedies have substance.

BENJAMIN DE MOTT

Reading They've Liked

SOMEONE ONCE SAID that Leavis' *The Great Tradition* should have been called "Reading I've Liked;" a similar remark could be made about each of the books at hand. Neither is a work of criticism in exactly the Leavisite mode, and one includes readings (unfavorable reviews of *The Deer Park*) which its author detested. But the titles of both tease the reader, as Leavis did, with hopes of certified revelation, or at least of fresh matter, and in that sense they could stand amending. *Advertisements for Myself* is a sampling and critique by Norman Mailer of the writing he has done at various stages of his career; its title points at the critique alone, which consumes much less space than the sampling of already published work. *Fiction of the Fifties* is a collection of short stories written or published in that decade; its title implies a view of a subject, a vision of a period, when in point of fact the book has virtually nothing to offer in this line.

How much can be offered? What indeed was the Fiction of the Fifties? One who knew the answers would write a large book to be handprinted on old taffeta and mass-mailed to veterinarians and chiropractors in six selected states by the Ford Foundation. Herbert Gold, who does not know the answers, writes only a few thousand words on the subject, declares his faith in Style, and directs himself with more enthusiasm to the future than to the past. No doubt there *are* some Points to be made about the fiction of the past ten years: the English novel became readable again; urban experience—the wheeler and dealer world of New York, Topeka, and Choate—established itself as the only momentous experience known to the fictionist or to his audience, with the result that the Gossip Novel marvelously flourished; the idea of detachment, the notion of the story teller as *The Invisible Man*, disappeared utterly from sight; and, as freshmen say, so forth. And it is possible that Gold should have permitted some idea of this, or a more respectable, sort to violate his mind when he sat to his Introduction. But, as already indicated, his failure to do so would probably have gone unnoticed had his book borne a different title.

As it stands, the collection does comment, tangentially at least, on an issue relevant to one direction of recent writing: the relation, that is, between gossip and its opposite, life. Several of its more affecting pieces take as their subjects episodes well adapted to the gossipy objective tongue and then enter them with stealth that yields a truth—thereby functioning as mockery of gossip. Gold's own "Love and Like," a harrowingly unprotected story, and Malamud's well-built "Magic Barrel" are such tales, and

¹ FICTION OF THE FIFTIES, A DECADE OF AMERICAN WRITING, edited by *Herbert Gold*. Doubleday. \$3.95. ADVERTISEMENTS FOR MYSELF, by *Norman Mailer*. Putnam. \$5.00.

so too is the piece of John Cheever about the man who kissed his baby-sitter and afterward bought a lathe. It should be said in passing that the latter writer is clearer than anyone else in the volume about what his "material" means. "The Country Husband," like all his stories, unrolls in a perfect circle of romantic melancholy which, though patched and decorated with a thousand baroque epicycles—jokes, fantasies, parodies of *Timestyle* detail, random lyric swells—is finally fixed in an absolute vision: Westchester and Fairfield as hell. Obviously there are limits to what can be expressed through a perfect circle, but there is enough truth in the contentions with which writers like Cheever work (for instance: to grow up is to learn to lie), and enough wit in the piece in question to put these limits out of mind for the length of a short read: Gold was right to include this story.

He is not always right—which is to say nothing except that he is an anthologist. He speaks of having made his choices in order to suggest a "specific character of American experience in the Fifties," but since, to repeat, the nature of this character remains undefined, some choices seem more odd than tendentious. Bellow's amusing monologue of Dr. Pep is, after all, a kind of exercise: who could reasonably value it above "Looking for Mr. Green"? G. P. Elliott's "Among the Dangs" is an original idea that makes an interesting parallel to Bellow's notion of sending Henderson to Africa, but Elliott is a more compelling writer in family tales like "Children of Ruth." J. F. Powers' "The Devil was a Joker" steps outside the parish house and is interesting on that account, but in bringing forth its central characters into the light of sympathy it mixes tones and attitudes confusingly, and the reader is quickly reminded that the astringent neatness of pieces like "Dawn" was nothing to be taken for granted. William Eastlake, a writer who seems in a better position than most younger Americans to write a comic novel subtler than *Ma Kettle*, is too tolerant of the softness or decency of his own nature: his "In a While Crocodile" is another rendering of the myth of the Jazz Hero, this time with a Navajo background, and unlike his attractive "Little Joe," offers more sentiment than innocence. R. V. Cassill, often a fanciful writer, is represented by a drab first-person depression piece that collapses, as it now appears that all such pieces must, into a heap of self-pity. A few readers will be mystified by the principle that excludes Eudora Welty and includes Flannery O'Connor, especially since Miss Welty is of an age with some of the writers in the volume, and published a collection recently (*The Bride of the Innisfallen*, 1955), and is Miss O'Connor's superior in every reckonable way. And harsh minds may proceed from this or another irrelevant prejudice to conclude that *Fiction of the Fifties* is the product of a (desultory) reading program that concentrated too heavily on issues of New York literary magazines, and a few old Avon paperbacks and Martha Foley collections. But the likelihood is that the lack of variety in the voices of these fifteen narrators, the uniformity of tone, the general flatness of the diction, was a consequence of the editor's enthusiasm for what may as well be termed plain style, language that does not call attention to

itself, rather than of limited reading. The taste described is certainly honorable: by following it Gold has been led to reprint two admirable stories by relatively uncelebrated writers, Anatole Broyard's "What the Cystoscope Said," the prize tale of the collection, and Leo Litwak's "The Solitary Life of Man," a war story with a Jewish hero that is almost unbelievably bare of clichés. And in further rebuttal of the charge that the collection leaves an impression of sameness because the editor did not know where to find variety, it can be said that the impression could have been relieved simply by the choice of different stories by a few of the writers who are included.

The decision not to include Norman Mailer was, though, a mistake. (Gold explains in a note that he did not wish to reprint the Prologue to Mailer's work in progress and Mailer refused to let him use anything else.) Though not self-contained, the sample of his recent writing which Mailer offered would have added much to the collection. "In bad weather the wind was a phenomenon, a New England wind of the lost narrow faiths which slashed through open doors, tempted shutters loose from their catch and banged them through the night, vibrated every small pane in every Cape Cod window and came souging out of the sky with the cries of storm water in its vaults—" there is a force in such language unmatched by most of the writers Gold represents. Nor is its excess finally a fair object for scorn. Mailer thinks of himself as the originator of a set of ideas (expounded in "The White Negro") that will help him to soar above the mob of ordinary writers. He means "to turn the consciousness" of the age, to become "the first philosopher of Hip"; he wishes to "attempt an entrance into the mysteries of murder, suicide, incest, orgy, orgasm and Time" on the ground that to stay outside them in present-day America is to "starve our sense of the real." But to some readers it will seem that his present strength stems from his voice not from his ideas, and is a matter of growth to a power of rhetoric that owes its conception of scale to Faulkner and Melville, and to an intensity of despair and self-torment which, even granting Connolly's point about artists henceforth being judged by the quality of their despair, can only be envied by a madman.

Whether or not this view is correct, it is clear that *Advertisements for Myself* is one of the most self-conscious volumes of writing about writing that has been produced in America for years. In a series of highly readable italicized headnotes to the selections from his Works, Mailer describes at length, and for an easily definable purpose, the circumstances of composition, publication, and promotion of everything he has written. There are perhaps a few distractions. The author gives an account of the situation of his liver, admires his ability to fight even after being hit on the head with a hammer, condemns writers who are short of stature and do not use four letter words, quotes his letter to Hemingway asking for a serious opinion of *The Deer Park* and instructing the man to fourletter-word himself if he refuses to speak (package returned, address unknown), and admits to "too much sex, liquor, marijuana, benzedrine and seconal . . ." Besides composing critical judgments in Sophomoric Opaque ("At

his best, his [Kerouac's] love of language has an ecstatic flux"), he provides social notes ("it always gave me a boost to know that Jim [Jones] was in town," "Vance Bourjaily is an old acquaintance and on occasion we are friends," "I do not know that one could call [Gore Vidal] a friend," "I . . . happened to run into [Calder Willingham] at the White Horse Tavern"), explains in connection with each of his literary assessments whether he owes the person assessed a favor, names the man he regards as the ace politico of the age ("Styron has spent years oiling every literary lever and power which could help him on his way, and there are medals waiting for him in the mass media"), and ventures to predict some grand futures ("If the rest of William Burroughs' [*Naked Lunch*] is equal to what was shown, and if the novel proves to be a novel and not a collage of extraordinary fragments, then Burroughs will deserve rank as one of the most important novelists in America, and may prove comparable in his impact to Jean Genet").² The reader, or peeper, who recalls that the layers of complexity in all this were thickened by reviews written by men on whom Mailer passed judgment (one of them, Vidal, indicated that everyone who was savaged in *Advertisements for Myself* knew long ago that the author of the book was an Enemy), will readily grasp that Mailer does succeed in turning the house of fiction into a place of lively enticement. But these distractions and enticements never really hide the purpose, which is to search out some important meaning in the history of the reputation of Norman Mailer. And what emerges as the search is pursued is that Mailer has rarely written a line without asking himself: What will They think of it? how many will They buy? where will They place me? can I force Them to let me stay on top? am I on top? why are They pushing me off?

The pathos generated by such questions is not a matter of the self-hatred they ultimately betray (" . . . I was cowardly when I should have been good, and too brave on many a bad chance, and I spent my first thirty years abusing my body, and the last six in forced marches on my brain, and so I am more stupid today than I ought to be, my memory is half-gone, and my mind is slow; from fear and vanity I paid out too much for what I managed to learn . . ."). Neither is it a consequence of the clichés in which Ambition expresses itself ("the [new] book will be fired to its fuse by the rumor that once I pointed to the farthest fence and said that within ten years I would try to hit the longest ball ever to go up into the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters"). It is, rather, the familiar pathos of a familiar American figure: the artist as sucker. For though he rants at his country and insists violently on his "difference," Mailer does share the national faith: at the core of the book, the key to its longing, is the idea of Success, belief in the sanctity of The Career. Page after page mocks the lives of the demure and the careful;

² As a service to literary history it might be remarked here that Burroughs has indicated (in the January, 1960 *NRF*) that he would approve of the comparison Mailer makes.

page after page embraces the central values of these lives. The reader is left to conclude that Mailer's desire for Triumph is greater than his desire for a decent cause of war, that Mailer believes a book cannot matter as much as its reception ("The way to save your work and reach more readers is to advertise yourself, steal your own favorite page out of Hemingway's unwritten Notes From Papa On How The Working Novelist Can Get Ahead"), and that a work of art should be brought forth under conditions—ceaseless excitement, cruel fear of competition, grubby tormented desolate emptiness—no different from those of the ailing salesman who whips himself miserably onward after a million dollar year.

Say to this writer the name Huizinga, the word *play*, the lines "And maybe I shall take a trout/If but I do not seem to care," and he burns with rage against puerile academic cant. Suggest that even if, in an age of mass-art and mass-careerism, the best that can be achieved in the way of a loss of driven-ness is a pretense to it, the pretense is still necessary, and he answers with no grin: "It is my present and future work which will have the deepest influence of any work being done by an American novelist in these years." Some of Mailer's reviewers have granted him his assumption, and not all these men are fools, enemies of promise glad to shout Saints! Saints! Go Go Go! and do whatever else they can to encourage an artist to produce yet another of those immense willed attempts at greatness that meaninglessly clutter the history of American letters. There is serious reason for believing in Mailer's gifts and hoping for their future. He is not the first modern writer to feel an intense need for a system (let Hip and Square be the Hudson Street version of Yeats' moons), and his system could prove to be (in an imaginative work) something other than a series of rapid paradoxes. Moreover the sex-maddened, furious, existential voice that speaks in "The Time of her Time," and the spaciously ironical rumination of the Prologue itself are at moments breathtakingly new, and it is a fact that the hatred in this book is not only fortifying but moral in what is now the only possible meaning of that word. But none of this suffices to banish the doubts raised by Mailer's conception of himself and of his mission.

Naming these doubts is awkward: they are based on nothing but an estimate, or guess, about how far history has gone—an estimate which Mailer could not accept. Conceivably he is correct. Conceivably a writer is now free to speak, act, and drive himself constantly in the name of victory instead of in the name of creation without fear of forcing upon himself, or upon his audience, disbelief in his work. Conceivably a hundred years of *kitsch* has already put to death the notion of the artist as the man who pleases himself, does what he does in magnificent, even comic, disinterest, mocks from the only position of strength left on earth the bitch goddess who teases the universal nerve. But if so, it still remains a puzzle why any writer would be eager that this should be the case, eager to be known as simply another ambitious man waiting to be assessed like ten million others, eager to be hung by nothing but a thread of Critical

Opinion. Mailer speaks of "shaping a response" to his work, his every gesture makes clear that he demands assessment *now* as a Turner of Consciousnesses—and it seems not to have occurred to him that an audience which has been framed for the task of assessing can never have its consciousness turned, can only face him in a condition of self-consciousness mirroring his own.

To object in the present fashion is not to pretend that innocence of the word survives in 1960; it is to say that he who wants to rule a purely literary world wants ashes, and is likely to end as an emperor of nobody: secure in Greatness that is a Judgment delivered from above but not a dawning, not that gesture of self-protection made by a reader who, having lost himself in an encounter, having been surprised or stunned into too much awareness, stands in need of a way to master his excitement and hence says: Oh it is too much for me, it is—great. The comical fatuity of such a desire has its counterpart in the cant of the routine jerks and jackals of literary New York who in adman style worship "pro" writers, and whine against scholars, teachers, learned doctors, out of town journalists, farmers and fishermen on the ground that although breathing and breeding, hiring and firing, longing and fearing, the latter know no gossip and do not ride the IRT, hence are not alive. And the comedy *is*, finally, a comedy of naiveté, as in the answer to Peterkin's question about what good came of the battle: "I cannot tell but 'twas a famous victory." But the idea of chuckling at it, when the book whose effect it has already blurred might be a work otherwise capable of bracing the age to the wall, is in some way murderous to faith in art.

Murder on then, says a cheerful voice tired of art-yammering, let The Faith die. Or rather, let it be buried: it has been lying uncovered for years. The voice can hardly be dismissed; it delivers a message from the already massive Public which has lost its taste for art by wallowing too long in gossip—to return to that—and "the people do have a right to be entertained." Finding a satisfactory retort to such persuasion is plainly impossible, and denying that the school of abuse here described offers courses that cannot fail to entertain the Public would be deceitful. But for the contributors to *Fiction of the Fifties* and all others not yet wholly gravelled by Bonapartism—characters whose silence or isolation, as Montaigne unsympathetically explained it before the first flood, may only mean that they have "gone back that they might leap the better, and with a stronger motion make a nimbler offer amidst the multitude—" there could still be a hint of a Positive Lesson in the teaching of this school. A pliant item at that, something that reads the same in hip and square: Hang Posterity, forget *Time*, keep the faith—to yourself, and jump for nothing but joy.

RICHARD FOSTER

With Great Passion, A Kind of Person

KENNETH REXROTH HAS BEEN ONE OF OUR YOUNGER POETS for over thirty years now, publishing his work in magazines with names like *Gallstone* and *The Brass Baboon*. And since I am a standard academic who has been alive only about as long as he has been writing, some initial explanation of how I came to this encounter seems in order. It all began about a year ago when I was lackadaisically riffling through *New Directions 16*, past Jack Jones and Frank O'Hara and other such shaggy folk, and my eye froze on a piece of stupendously vituperative prose on the decline of the anarchistic principle in contemporary American literature. I read on. It was called "The World Is Full of Strangers," and it was by Rexroth, that crank writer of prose pseudo-poetry I had never read but knew all about. I have always had a nasty secret taste for vituperation, and when I heard, some months later, that a collection¹ of Rexroth's essays had come out I got hold of it as fast as I could. It read like a good novel—subtle, vivid, intense, and deeply compelling. And cumulatively it created, as both good essay and good fiction create, character: a person who moves, speaks, lives in its pages—Rexroth. My title is a phrase Kenneth Rexroth once wrote about George Barker, and after reading the essays in *Bird in the Bush*, I concluded that it applied with equal point to its author.

Bird in the Bush is a good book for many reasons, but mainly because it is so various and lively and unacademic. It has some sharp, fresh, slightly offbeat perspectives on standard modern figures—Yeats as the "greatest" modern playwright, Lawrence as poet, Baudelaire as capitalism's "delinquent," and Rimbaud as "capitalist adventurer." It also has some of the most responsive and intelligent and least jargon-ridden writing on extra-literary matters that I've run into in the prose of a literary man—on jazz, on American humor, on painting (Turner, Léger, Mark Tobey, and Morris Graves). There is a long, fine essay, at once learned, sensitive, and critical, on "The Hasidism of Martin Buber," and another, shorter, but of the same essential order, on oriental classic fiction. And finally, there are two very funny personal accounts, written for *The Nation*, of Rexroth's experiences with the 1957 International Industrial Development Conference and the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research at the University of California. "The World is Full of Strangers" isn't, alas, included. I guess even publisher James Laughlin's notable courage sometimes touches limits. And Rexroth himself has excluded the essays he was publishing a few years ago in behalf of the Beat Generation writers. The Beats turned out not to be what he thought they were—the Fifties' version

¹ *BIRD IN THE BUSH*, by *Kenneth Rexroth*. New Directions. \$3.75.

of traditional American idealist anarchism. "Success," he writes in his introduction, transformed them into "the trained monkeys, the clowning helots of the Enemy. They came to us late, from the slums of Greenwich Village, and they departed early, for the salons of the millionairesses."

It is in just such passages that the personality of Rexroth comes through to you. He is intensely personal in his responses and his tone. And he shares with D. H. Lawrence a great talent for the rhetoric of contempt. When such a talent combines, as in both Lawrence and Rexroth, with intelligence and moral intensity, it becomes a humane art. Where Lawrence's technique is inflationary—pumping up, by the momentum of incantation, the silly into the monstrously grotesque—Rexroth's technique is deflationary: the quick stab of epigrammatic *reductio*. Rexroth is so good at epigram that he sometimes seriously harms his poetry with it. Excepting the case where epigram *is* the poem, it tends *in* poetry to reduce poetry to smartness. But of course it is a sharp instrument in the prose of judgment, which is the kind of prose that Rexroth's most often is. And if you read, as I do, with a compulsive pencil dragging at your hand, you will find yourself lining out much of the worth of *Bird in the Bush* as epigram. Here are some of my favorites:

The hipster is the furious square.

[The Foundation] has replaced the "Radical Movement" as the great source of interesting careers for the unemployable children of the middle and upper classes . . . , like India or the Church in nineteenth-century England.

You can never base an educational system on the "Hundred Best Books." A hundred of the truest insights into life as it is would destroy any educational system and its society along with it.

The greater poetry is nobly disheveled. It never shows the scars of taking care.

In the final showdown, all our revolutions have turned out to be careers for some and programs for others.

True humor is the most effective mode of courage.

And sometimes they come in whole clusters—garlands:

Man thrives where angels die of ecstasy and pigs die of disgust. The contemporary situation is like a long-standing, fatal disease. It is impossible to recall what life was like without it. We seem always to have had cancer of the heart.

We are listening here to the voice of the writer—not just his tone, but his *voice* as the free and fully aware and impassioned articulation of an individual sensibility. It adopts no masks or personae that muffle or falsify it, though, like a good organ, it has many stops and modes and tonalities that serve to liberate all its color and meaning. This sense of voice, the con-

tinuity and integrity of the person as an articulate moral identity, pervades both Rexroth's prose and poetry. There is no *essential* difference between them, just as there is no essential difference between Yeats's poetry and spiritual autobiography, or between Lawrence's fiction and poetry, or between Ford's reminiscence and fiction. Both are together one, the utterance of the man. And what is said? The voice speaks, in all the tonalities from abstract principle through rage and humor to lyric and vision, and to me at least it speaks with power, of the ultimate importance of persons. It is a voice against systems of society and ideology in so far as those systems are the devourers of the sole ultimate value that we have—the value of persons.

And this philosophy of persons is about as far from Carlyle and Nietzsche or Henry Ford or Paul Bunyan as can be imagined. It is even a little chary of Whitman. Think instead of St. Francis for simplicity, Buddha for purity, Martin Buber for joy and good will, Sacco and Vanzetti for everyday conscience and courage, and Lawrence for passion and intelligence, and you've about got it. Except for Dr. Buber, whom Rexroth chastizes for naively championing statist Zionism, none of these people are committee people in one atom of their beings. Not even Dr. Buber is a team player, really, he is just too essentially happy to notice the fouling. The Enemy (to whom the Beats, in their professionalism, have gone over) is Society. Society: the imperious commune, whether capitalistic or communistic; the abstract mechanism of the group. Rexroth's "irreducible man" is the fountainhead of value, the bulwark, as he writes in the introduction to one of his volumes of poetry, against the "fools and rascals who are destroying the world." Among the chief destroyers are the intelligent and gifted who destroy the person in themselves and others by sustaining Society—by helping, with their talents, to make modern American life look like, as Rexroth puts it in one essay, "the lot of this hilariously sarcastic Russian movie I have been lost in for the past ten years." These are the scientists, first of all, especially the psychologists and "social" scientists. But the humanists are also to blame—particularly the poets, custodians of the Word. Rexroth writes in his essay on Kenneth Patchen, "The majority of American poets have acquiesced in the judgment of the predatory society. They do not exist as far as it is concerned. They make their living in a land of make-believe, as servants of a hoax for children. They are employees of the fog factories—the universities." And as if as a consequence, the poems they write for "the fashionable quarterlies" (variously identified by Rexroth, e.g., "*The Vaticide Review*," "the Bronx edition of *PMLA*," etc.) are machined out of Donne and Hopkins as impersonal "construction" rather than personal "communication." One can see why Lawrence and Yeats are two of his favorite poets, why Martin Buber's *I and Thou* is his bible.

Art is not "construction"; art is the immediate communication of persons. Rexroth's principle is perhaps best stated in the first essay in *Bird in the Bush*, a lecture delivered at the University of Southern California called "Unacknowledged Legislators and 'Art Pour Art'":

The arts presume to speak directly from person to person, each polarity, the person at each end of the communication, fully realized. The speech of poetry is from me to you, transfigured by the overcoming of all thingness—reification—in the relationship. So speech approaches in poetry not only the directness and impact but the unlimited potential of act.

Rexroth once described, in his *New British Poets* anthology, Auden's basic fault as "a peculiar rhetorical imprecision of language"—"snide bright jargon" again and again displacing "the profoundly moving, despairing, nightbound, personal cry" that is Auden's truest voice. It was a case of "construction," or art, overwhelming "communication." "The world is blind and random," Rexroth writes in "Samuel Beckett and the Importance of Waiting":

Only man loves. . . . If we refuse to accept the world on secular terms, Godot isn't coming. If we accept it for ourselves, the comradeship of men, whether verminous tramps with unmanageable pants or Jim and Huck Finn drifting through all the universe on their raft—the comradeship of men in work, in art, or simply in waiting, in the utterly unacquisitive act of waiting, is an ultimate value. . . . So say Homer and Sam Beckett and anybody else, too, who has ever been worth his salt.

And this includes Rexroth's painters, too—Turner and Morris Graves as masters of vision and mystical perception, Léger as archetypalist of French sanity, Mark Tobey as "Painter of the Humane Abstract." Rexroth defines, with eloquence, the function of art within the community of men in his essay on "The Visionary Painting of Morris Graves":

Civilizations endure as long as, somewhere, they can hold life in total vision. The function of the contemplative is contemplation. The function of the artist is the revelation of reality in process, permanence and change, the place of value in a world of facts. His duty is to keep open the channels of contemplation and to discover new ones. . . . The activities of men endure and have meaning as long as they emanate from a core of transcendental calm. The contemplative, the mystic, assuming moral responsibility for the distracted, tries to keep his gaze fixed on that core. The artist uses the materials of the world to direct man's attention back to it. When it is lost sight of, society perishes.

Give or take some tonal differences, a few technicalities of dogma and politics, and the element of "manners," Rexroth is articulating—and with a significant shade more of personal commitment, I feel—the same philosophy of humane letters that has been expounded over the past thirty years by Eliot, Richards, Tate, Blackmur, and the majority of our most influential and respected critics. This fact, in conjunction with Rexroth's considerable accomplishment as a poet—he is good, though I don't have

space here to show why—makes his neglect by his contemporaries all the more striking.

There is much, at any rate, that I personally like in this philosophy of persons that contains and defines the foregoing philosophy of art. One of its appealing ancillary values is the principle of comic incongruity as a counterpoint to the principle of tragic awareness. In his essay on American humor, Rexroth calls it “Homeric” humor:

A sense of the consistent principle of incongruity on which Nature, for all our science and philosophy, really operates. The realization that the accepted, official version of anything is most likely false and that all authority is based on fraud. . . . The appreciation of the wonderful hilarity of the processes of human procreation and elimination. The acceptance of the fact that nobody made it that way—it just happened.

All this seems to me to be true and healthy and, especially for our time, humanly therapeutic as a viewpoint. And I also like the moral common-sense of Rexroth’s Hasidic principle of human decency, the principle that goodness rather than guilt is the basis of what is human. This passage is from the essay on Buber:

It is curious that with the exception of the Quakers, Christianity and the religions influenced by it teach or at least imply that it is very, very hard to be a good human being. This is simply not true, not at least for a person not corrupted by manufactured guilts. It is not only easy to avoid lying, stealing, fornication, covetousness, idolatry, pride, anger, jealousy, and the rest, it is a positive pleasure. Essential to such a life are magnanimity, courage, and the love and trust of other men. . . . These are all virtues of direct dealing with other men. . . .

I regard this as a good thought, and with the possible exception of the courage part an applicable one.

But guilt does not go out of the picture. Actually, such a belief makes the humanizing knowledge of real guilt possible by banishing unreal or abstract guilt, which often turns into a technique of moral irresponsibility. In our world, where the principle of Society has usurped the principle of persons, to feel guilt, *personal* guilt, is one of the great treasures of the individual who wants to keep hold of some fragment of his human identity. It gives him a humane and humanizing perspective on the guilt of Society and on his own guilt and the guilt of others who, through weakness or circumstance, are in complicity with it. And such complicity is one of the major moral themes of Rexroth’s poetry. As he writes at the end of a long poem called “The Phoenix and the Tortoise,”

Men drop dead in the ancient rubbish
Of the Acropolis, scholars fall
Into self-dug graves, Jews are smashed
Like heroic vermin in the Polish winter.

This is my fault, the horrible term
Of weakness, evasion, indulgence,
The total of my petty fault—
No other man's.

Only such an intense capability of moral self-awareness can equip the self for, and justify it in, an occasional self-excepting annihilatory moral judgment of the Other.

There is enough bad writing in Rexroth—more, especially in his poetry, than in the writing of his more “official” contemporaries. Part of the craftsman’s training and practice, of course, is to form, even to compromise, the passion of integrity; and this Rexroth has consistently refused to do. There are bound to be spots of bad writing when a man’s voice is being deeply and personally engaged by his subjects. Rexroth’s special sort of badness, however, centers not in barbarism but in pedantry. He becomes so earnest about his serious philosophical themes that he sometimes lapses into the boring gibberish, the horrible dead jargon, of the pseudo-Philosopher. There is more of this, curiously, in his poetry than in his prose, and almost none at all in *Bird in the Bush*. Rexroth, who believes most in poetry, modestly refers to *Bird in the Bush* as “journalism.” It is much better than that—much more fun. It is a fine collection of essays, full of vitality, humor, intelligence, and the passion of integrity. They are not just “criticism”; they create the image of a person. And if that image gets hold of you, you may be led on to discover, as I did, that at his best Rexroth is an unreasonably neglected and very fine lyric poet as well.

PATRICK CRUTTWELL

Augustan Minor

THIS IS CERTAINLY THE "DEFINITIVE" EDITION of Prior.¹ It has all the external signs of such an edition of an English poet; it is large and weighty, and it appears in the familiar dark blue and chaste gilt of the Oxford University Press. The textual editing, so far as I am able to judge, is impeccable. The notes and commentary are excellent as far as they go, but it may be doubted if they always go as far as they might in the way of explanation. Admittedly, the editors warn us that "obsolete words, and obsolete uses of words still current, are explained only if they are very unusual"; but there are many occasions when "very unusual" appears to be interpreted by the standards of fellow-specialists. The editors must certainly envisage a reader of remarkable erudition if they expect him to understand what is meant by "Sir Martin" on p. 228; what kind of drink was a "Double Bub" (p. 269); what was the significance, in dicing, of "slur a six" and "the Nick" (p. 272); and just what was done to "Romish Priests in *Swede*" (p. 261). None of these is explained. It is true that two of them are elucidated in the big Oxford Dictionary, so we must assume that the editors expect their readers to keep at hand the twelve fat volumes of that work. This, of course—what to explain and what to leave unexplained—is always a problem for the editors of texts which abound in obscurities, and if a reviewer should quarrel with omissions (or with inclusions), the fault need not be the editors'; it may be that the reader they are thinking of is not the same. Nevertheless, I cannot avoid the mercenary thought (and it is, after all, unprejudiced on my part, for I have not paid for *my* copy) that a customer who has forked out twenty dollars and twenty cents is entitled to find such things expounded. And if it is a question of space, would not the considerable space which is expended on matters of provenance, on notes such as this—

Mss. *L* 29, 36 (D); *L* 29, 42 (D); *B.M.Add.* 31152, 34 (X); *Ketton MS.* (X).

Pub. H.M.C. *12th Rep.*, App. IX, 1891. p. 189 (from MSS. of R. W. Ketton). Collected: 1907, p. 355.

Text. *L* 29 (36). Collated: *L* 29 (40); *L* 29 (42); *B. M.*

—have been better expended on fuller annotation, with the provenance relegated to a separate bibliography? I am not denying the value or necessity of this kind of scholarship; I am merely querying its appro-

¹THE LITERARY WORKS OF MATTHEW PRIOR, edited by H. Bunker Wright and Monroe K. Spears. Oxford University Press. Two vols. \$20.20.

priateness in a general edition, if it means the exclusion of matter more useful to those readers (a majority, I believe) who do not design to produce an edition even more definitive.

But where the poet is Matthew Prior, and where the reader is merely a reader of poetry, these questions are academic in more senses than one; for it soon becomes clear that the more annotation a poem of his requires, the less likely it is to be worth reading. (This is not the case with all writers; it is not the case with Prior's incomparably greater contemporary Pope, whose *Dunciad* demands—but can carry—an even heavier load of annotation.) Those who know Prior only as the writer of half a dozen light lyrics and epigrams, which need no annotation at all, will discover from this edition what a very small proportion of his work those half-dozen represent and how different they are from the bulk of the rest. He was clearly a very minor poet; this major edition makes that even clearer by exhibiting at length his failures when he strove to be more. And he did strive, very hard. He turned out his fair quota of those punishing works of celebration or cerebation which fill out the volumes of eighteenth-century verse; he wrote his *Solomon on the Vanity of the World, A Poem in Three Books* (and in two thousand six hundred lines), "the work" (says Johnson) "to which he entrusted the protection of his name, and which he expected succeeding ages to regard with veneration" and the work on which Johnson, as usual, gives the final verdict. "Tediousness is the most fatal of all faults." He wrote, in praise of King William, his *Carmen Seculare*, "in which" (Johnson again) "he exhausts all his powers of celebration"; and the results of his exhaustion are like this:

*Whither would'st Thou further look?
Read WILLIAM'S Acts, and close the ample Book;
Peruse the Wonders of His dawning Life;
How, like ALCIDES, he began;
With Infant Patience calm'd Seditious Strife,
And quell'd the Snakes which round his Cradle ran . . .*

In such writing, he is neither better nor worse than a score of other writers of verse, in that age when verse-writing was still to some degree the elegant accomplishment of a gentleman, which it had been since the Renaissance. There is also, entirely appropriate, the inevitable quantum of verses in Latin—reminding us again how much of the effort of that age went into such verses, how important they could be to a writer's standing (Johnson first came into notice by his rendering of Pope's *Messiah*), and how incomplete is our view of the age's literary scene, which ignores them.

All this is completely irrelevant to Prior's claim to permanence, which is small but definite. It is notable that his enduring works are different from the rest not only in tone—they are light where the rest are heavy—but also in form. They are neither in the extended effusions

of the heroic couplet nor in the formal ode. They are either in the measures of ballad or lyric or in the brevity of epigram. It is clear that for Prior such forms implied relaxation. When he wrote in them, he was not trying to be a poet, so he was one. He was one of those who write worse the harder they try to write well, and whose work stands the best chance of proving durable when it was designed to be temporary. When such a paradox is observed, it is natural to ask where the blame lies. Is it with the age or with the man, when a writer fails in those forms which the age regards with most respect and succeeds only when neither he nor the age cares if he succeeds or not? In this case, the blame seems to lie with the man; for of course it was not impossible to succeed in the forms of dignity and solemnity. Pope did it, and so did Johnson. Prior's talent, small and light, could not do it; but the age told him that he ought to. It is odd that the age should have told him so and that he should have accepted the obligation; for he was a thoroughly successful man in other spheres. He had "burst out," as Johnson puts it, "from an obscure original to great eminence"; he had become the right hand man of the Tory government in the diplomacy and negotiations which led to the end of Marlborough's wars. Why should he have wanted also eminence as a poet? Why should his political associates have been willing to grant it him—and not regard his political usefulness as thereby made suspect? His equivalents today would not dream of writing poetry—imagine Dulles or Selwyn Lloyd in *that* role!—and if they did would be regarded as highly unreliable by colleagues and voters alike. The fact is that in the early eighteenth century literature and politics were not things apart; they were inextricably connected. It was not remarkable, it was natural, that writers like Swift and Pope should have been close to the leaders of one party, Addison and Steele to the leaders of another. For this a price had to be paid. It was paid in the form of a great deal of "public" writing of little value and a good deal of personal skulduggery; it was paid, in the case of Prior, by the torturing of a small and private talent as it stretched itself to large and public ends. How much strain, one may wonder, did that stretching impose? How aware was Prior himself that his gift was being misused? Like so many of the Augustans, Prior is ultimately a mystery; for in spite of all their easy urbanity, their graceful chit-chat, they are really much more elusive than a Romantic poet who tells us all, and now and then they will come out with something which throws a dark doubt on all that elegant surface. Prior has one such utterance, the two-line epigram which goes:

*What trifling coil do we poor mortals keep;
Wake, eat, and drink, evacuate, and sleep.*

Was that his true verdict on his busy and successful life?

COMMUNICATIONS

Dear Sirs,

Your reviewer has attributed his own confusion about ideas unfamiliar to him to my book *The Way Down and Out*, lashing out like an enraged camel at his whole burden—missing as he must—even to the point of correcting imaginary errors in my French and English. Of course there are real slips enough, but most of them have been privately pointed out to me, as good taste dictates. I shall not list his mistakes about my supposed errors since they are mean and in themselves uninteresting. The significance is in their cause.

My book is complex; reduced to either/or, any real idea disappears. I argue that Baudelaire was not an "aesthete"—that is, not a man who thinks the meaning of life and art lies in sensation; in the strict sense he was "intellectual"; your reviewer replies that Baudelaire loved "beauty." But beauty, like truth, pertains to the intellect. Beauty is not sensation; it is the ordering of sensation according to a principle beyond it. From Plato and Aristotle on, the whole of our art and thought has been predicated on that axiom. The only attacks on it have been attacks on rationality itself—the empiricist's reduction to dumb fact; the nominalist's to convention; and both combined in positivism which reduces thought to tautology and fact to chance. In literature the first finds its extreme in the "documentary," the second in that aesthetic playing with ideas as if they were sensations which is called "sensibility," and both are combined in mythographers like Joyce and Faulkner. Your reviewer says the "immediate" goal of poetry is aesthetic. Does he mean *nihil in intellectu nisi prius in sensu*? Of course that great sentence applies to art as to science or philosophy. We come to knowledge by means of the senses. But that is not the "aesthetic" view among contemporary critics. These oppose "sensibility" to "meaning," taking means as ends in themselves which I have compared to idolatry, the worshipping of graven images. Baudelaire puts it stronger: "La passion frénétique de l'art est un chancre qui dévore le reste." My book makes all this very clear, except to those who lack the interest or the equipment to understand. Your reviewer is angry because he doesn't know what Baudelaire and I are talking about. I have asked him to consider the lilies of the field, and he has replied that the Emperor has no clothes—not hesitating to add, so off with his head.

When faced with such formidable misunderstanding one looks for

reasons. Is there not something really wrong—not just with one French teacher, but some grave invasion of mindlessness? A first rate and witty critic, Robert Adams, in the very same issue of your magazine, commits treason to his own gifts by declaring Richard Ellmann's book on Joyce "the best literary biography of our time," and worse, declares it best in part at least because "happily devoid of polemic, of literary flourishes, of speculative fancy." And in the same issue also Mr. Adams' book on Stendhal is joyously praised because it is "polemical," "inspired gossip," "scholarship he shrugs off, 'the minute anything bored me, I put it down.' " Now this treason begins to look like a conspiracy. Adams and Ellmann are very attractive opposites; and that attraction in a less sympathetic mood is what makes your review of my book so repellent—an anti-intellectuality on the one hand superstitiously amassing facts, on the other agnostically blowing up ideas, and a combination of the worst of both, a shallow scholar and a dull wit.

The academies have been invaded already: Graduate students are recruited to compile facts from endless "acquisitions" while teachers meanwhile compose flippant reviews. Poets sell their present rough-drafts as they used to sell their future cadavers, for dissection and display. The machinery of fact and fancy, without principles, constructs parodies of scholarship and criticism, fostering students mechanically selected for their ability not to comprehend ideas, so that our universities, grinding out a generation of clods and fops—must it be our quarterlies too?—might come to deserve Coomaraswamy's precise formulation of the teaching of the Anti-Christ: "to cast false pearls before real swine."

JOHN SENIOR

Ithaca, N. Y.

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for sending me the text of Mr. Senior's letter about my review of his book, *The Way Down and Out*.

My review, as I mentioned to one of your editors at the time I submitted it, was a much longer one than Mr. Senior's book deserved; but its lengthiness was dictated by a sincere desire to document and justify my very severe criticism.

As I wrote the review, I kept thinking of one of my favorite quotations, which runs as follows: "Whatever talents a person may possess to amuse and instruct others, be they ever so inconsiderable, he is yet bound to exert them: if his attempt be ineffectual, let the punishment of an unaccomplished purpose have been sufficient; let none trouble themselves to heap the dust of oblivion upon his efforts; the pile they raise will betray his grave which might otherwise have been unknown."

Obviously, I have already heaped a good deal too much dust on Mr. Senior's book and shall refrain from heaping any more.

His book, my review of it, and now the text of Mr. Senior's letter, are all readily available to the readers of *The Hudson Review*. I am quite ready to let them decide for themselves whether I am indeed—as Mr. Senior so urbanely and charitably puts it—an enraged camel, a veritable symbol of mindlessness, a shallow scholar, and a dull wit.

ARTHUR J. KNODEL

Los Angeles, Calif.

The Longview Foundation announces the granting of 1959 Longview Literary Awards to the following writers, for work published in THE HUDSON REVIEW:

NEWTON ARVIN for "*The House of Pain*"—Spring 1959

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